Cerveau en Feu

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Cerveau en Feu

by alivehawk1701

Summary

Hannibal wakes up in a field with no memory of how he got there, covered in blood, which, really, should have been an indication to him that something was wrong. But a sick Hannibal is a dangerous Hannibal. He's aware of madness, skirts it, denies it, observes it, will not let it consume him. But what if Hannibal was the one that got encephalitis in Series One? He's no longer in control . . . who is?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

I rolled over onto my back and could see the stars. Through the clearing of wispy clouds a few of the brightest were joined slowly by others. And others. The sky was not all dark. Far from it. It glimmered and shone with the energy of a million suns. I thought of the Ancient Greeks' belief that the heavens were a blazing inferno where only the shroud of the night sky separated the fiery cosmos from the earth. And the stars were just pinprick holes through which the heavens peeked. For a moment, lying there, it seemed like the fires would drip out, heavy and molten upon the earth. On me. I chased my breath, the feeling of lungfuls of air oddly unfamiliar as an awareness of the rest of my body followed slowly like through uneven ruts. I was cold. Wet. I lifted my arms into the air and they were dark. The sharp tang of copper hit my nostrils. I reached out around me and where I expected grass my hands met a soft and sticky bed of flesh and organs and blood.

I was curled up in the desecrated chest cavity of a corpse. It had once been warm but, after the night had fallen, I'd pulled the intestines over myself for warmth like a blanket. The cool air had leached the heat from the body. Cooled the blood into sticky pools no longer a brilliant red. My own shivering woke me up.

I laid my arms back down beside me. My fingers nestled in the silken folds of cool innards. I allowed myself time to get used to the rise and fall of my own chest. Wiggle my toes. Stretch my legs. I wasn't dreaming.

I don't know how I got here.

I don't know who this corpse is.

And I don't know where here is.

I grasped after memories like broken ropes falling from tattered sails, losing them to the sea, unable to piece together what events, in what order, led to this.

The last thing I remember, I was leaving work.

Pushing the cool, sticky intestines from my body I sat up slowly. Eyes focused in the darkness and I looked down at myself and found I was naked. The corpse and I were lying in a field. In the distance was a row of trees. There were no lights visible. A cold wind blew through the tall grasses and brought with it the smell of oncoming snow and frost.

Immediately upon sitting up a wave a nausea swept over me and, with barely any time to roll to my knees, a violent shudder ran up my spine and I vomited helplessly into the grass. The moonlight only offered me shadowed details but from what I could see through my watering eyes, it was mostly blood. And bits of undigested flesh. Staying on my hands and knees, shoulders shaking, I let the remaining bile and saliva drip from my gasping mouth, unable to move, not willing to. I felt I could be sick again but swallowed it back. Wiped my mouth and breathed. Just breathed.

This was a crime scene. And I was all over it. Hair. Skin. Now vomit. I looked around for a weapon and didn't see one. No glint of metal in the moonlight.

I shakily got to my feet and it felt like the ground was a loose film that someone was pulling away from me, making me stumble and fall. I chose a direction based on nothing. Aimless and hopeful until my barefeet met smooth tarmac. I stopped walking, if only to sway and chatter my teeth and then there in the distance. My car. Quickly looking from side to side and straining my ears and nose I searched for any sign of approaching cars or people. Nothing. I walked toward the car, strength and more questions building as I did so.

Clumsily, my numb hands ran over my body, searching for injuries but I found none. When I reached my car I was happy to see the doors were closed, the lights were off and, most importantly, it was unlocked then, reaching carefully into the driver seat, I found the keys in the ignition. Not wanting to get blood all over the interior of my car I opened the boot. I had all kinds of supplies in there.

I took rags and water and cleaned the blood and gore off my body. I thought back to my last memory, in search of how I and the dead man had come to be here.

"You know those meditation apps, the ones on your phone," Franklyn said. In session. The sun was still up. Franklyn was smiling in his usual constrained and tentative way, "I've started listening to them and they have the most relaxing, wonderful voices walking you through these meditations, it's incredible," I feel it coming, the way his eyes grasped and reached and cleaved toward me, needing so much from me, "You know," he said it like he'd just thought of it, "You should think about narrating one of them, Doctor."

I'd seen Franklyn at half four. The blood soaked rag I had been scrubbing over my bare chest froze over my stomach in shock. The body out in that field can't be Franklyn. Can it? I fought to remember more, lifting the veil like granite stones from my eyes. Franklyn had left the appointment. I remember him. I remember him walking out the door. And then nothing. Memory ends. Concussion? I lifted my hands to my head, probing, looking for pain; had I hit my head? No tenderness anywhere, no pain, my head was fine.

Cleaned of the worst of the gore I pulled on a pair of scrubs I had with my supplies and crawled into my car. Thankful for the warmth, drained and nauseous, I closed my eyes. Safe, I thought. Safe for now. Warm. Tired. I leaned back in the seat and my head fell to the side. Sleep claimed me again and I wasn't able to fight it.

Fingers and Toes

Chapter Notes

> Last chapter ended with Hannibal staggering to his car afer waking in a field with a murdered man.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hours later, according to the light of dawn on the horizon, I jolted awake. I hadn't dreamed. It had been pure darkness. Not even any stars. My whole body felt sore and vomit lingered sore on the ridges of my tongue. Gazing out the dewey windscreen the morning almost seemed calm, the sky cleared to a pale blue emerging from the rosey horizon.

It could have only been a few hours sleep. But now, with the gathering light I would be able to work. Clean up. I stepped from the car. Still barefoot. And now, with the tentatively wakeful light that matched my own, a clearer picture was drawn. My car was at an angle, halfway in a ditch. I was on a stretch of road with no street lamps. No houses. Not even border fences. I began to retrace my steps and cast my eyes up to the sky. Clouds had retreated west, losing their shape and form and dispersing across the sky. Hopefully no snow yet, I thought absently, shivering at the thought. I followed the bent and broken trail in the grass and, with the accumulating blood spatter, found the body.

It wasn't Franklyn. Part of me was relieved about this. He didn't deserve to die. Not like this. The body was torn apart as if by an animal. It laid on it's side, all that had been in, was out, splayed out around it like a many pointed star. The imprint of my body was still visible in the earth next to it. Moving closer, there were obvious signs of it being torn apart by some blade somewhere. And teeth. My teeth. I immediately felt nauseous again. I'd eaten raw human flesh. The hunger I knew for human was never ravenous, not like this, this bent and twisted sharply into the groaning, growling parts of my mind, long left behind for deliberate civility and selective savagery.

I'll clean up the body, part of me assured, the part that so expertly dealt out tasks, we'll take it back home and dispose of it properly. Any blood left in the field would, hopefully, look like nothing more than a hunter's kill.

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Can you see me? I whispered into the void. *Can you find me? Do you see me?*

I stood in front of the mirror. I barely recognize myself. Deep, dark circles were under my eyes. I looked pale and drawn. The small, rattling breaths I took into my chest revealed the outline of my ribs. On them were bruises. And on my arms. Someone defending themselves.

I'd blacked out. Lost time. Disassociated. I felt raw and drained and everything hurt. Pressing a hand to my face I felt my cheeks hot and clammy. I pushed my hand through my hair then down the sides of my head into the throbbing veins alongside my temples. My eyes rolled shut and behind them were bursts of red and violence.

Already tired limbs had taken what was left of the body down to the basement. Arm, leg, partially eaten organ, all wetly splattered into the tub, a multitude of reds and blues, jutting bones with nothing to hold up and the sticky stretch of skin and tendons together in an unidentifiable mound of flesh. I'd poured the acid over it and watched the colours dissolve, listened to the hiss and pop, nose tingling at the harsh smell.

Then I'd spent over an hour in the shower. Scrubbed every inch of skin, under every nail, ridding myself of any evidence of what had happened. It seemed so long since I'd had to do that. I've become so careful and precise in killing that the routine alone was something I barely thought about, didn't have to think about. I'd have to take my car in to be detailed. Restlessly I wondered where my clothes were, the ones I'd been wearing, and couldn't remember and didn't know where to look.

Go to the doctor, part me said, but what doctor; was this madness? Illness? Either way my mind shuddered and collapsed inward protectively at the thought, warning bells breaking through what had been such a prolonged sense of security. I'd thought I could afford scrutiny. Couldn't I? Illness was illness but infermity didn't lead to murder with most. I knew in the field, blanketed in ribbons of gore, and I know now; this is how they'll catch me.

I wasn't ready to be in a cage. Fear fostered a growing, mounting, gnashing resistance in me and I feverishly came to one clear thought; *don't let them take you like this* .

I looked again into the eyes of the man in the mirror. Someone was there I didn't know. Or hadn't seen in years. Goosebumps ran up my spine and along my arms and I was alone.

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"I cancelled my appointments today."

"Why?" Bedilia asked with a curious tilt of her head.

"I didn't sleep well," I answered vaguely. The heavy slap of meat on metal flashed across my mind. Of my knife severing tendons and nerves, disassembling the haphazard remains of the man in the field. I'd kept his head perched on the counter, facing me, hoping memories would surface from behind clouded eyes. Left everything else in an acid path to be washed away. I didn't want to eat him. Anymore of him.

"You weren't feeling well," she offered.

"I wasn't feeling my best."

"We all take the time we need for ourselves. You're no exception."

I let my eyes slant downward and felt my lips press together, "I've made it a point to be."

She considered this a moment, “We both know how important your image is. The pressure you apply in maintaining an ideal.”

She knew this much and enjoyed the idea of cleverness and the presumed proximity it afforded her. As I often did I looked at her with a careful admiration that bloomed like a bruise, heated and broken underneath.

I licked my lips, “You’re suggesting I’m too hard on myself.”

“I’m suggesting that a clenched fist must unclench at some point. Inevitably.”

I cleared my throat, keeping my upper lip from twitching, wondering how to engage with the smell of earth and grass and blood still in my pores. I could smell it, Could she? Therapy was therapy, however, and as much as I came to Bedelia for some balance I kept what was visible to the spine of the book, never the pages. And today, a thin translucent film laid between my words and my emotions, stretching against knuckles and wearing thinner with breath, “I may have become unaware of how difficult it is to be,” I struggled for the word, “Less than perfect around others,” I looked up, “It’s an uneasy position for me.”

“Your involvement with the FBI over the last few months may be extending your internal resources beyond what’s comfortable for you.”

“I’ve enjoyed working with the FBI,” I defended, in so many ways I’d enjoyed it. It’d made me want to write music again, “Helping Will with cases has been very fulfilling.”

“Nonetheless it has required you to develop yet another hat to wear.”

“I’m learning a lot. And connecting with people.”

“And yet you aren’t sleeping.”

“I’m not prone to black and white thinking. My involvement is neither all good or all bad.”

“If you were one of your clients, I’m sure you would encourage you to take time for yourself and be mindful of spreading yourself too thin.”

Self compassion is difficult, in fact, when compassion for others is such a varied landscape. “Perhaps you are right,” I conceded, wondering how and if she was in any degree right. Had I misjudged the risks? Maybe I was pushing myself too hard, enticing the delicate balance to sway. Maybe that was something I enjoyed.

“And,” she took a breath, “The efforts you put into your discretion are inextricably linked to my own.”

“I’m aware.”

“You’re not superhuman, Hannibal,” she said, “Even Atlas shrugged.”

I smiled weakly at the ciche, “I will make a more dedicated effort to engage with my hobbies.”

“Good,” she said, then, seeking further assurance, “How do you plan to do that?”

An easy answer, “I have a dinner party planned,” I said, noticing, regardless, an internal seizing of muscles at the prospect, “And Will said he would attend.”

Her face twitched. So noticeable. Maybe she was having an off day too. “It’s important to you that he be there?”

Another easy answer though with an uneasy and tenuous awareness, “I want to share what I enjoy with him.”

There was a pause. A very pregnant pause. Her carefully expressionless face again faulted for only a moment. In these times it was so easy to see, smell, and taste her humanity. As mcuh as she was aware of self preservation, careful with what she could control, she had the all too human trait of curiousity. And I admired that about her. It was also something I could exploit. She breathed deeply again, “Why now?” and when I looked at her sceptically she elaborated coolly, “Why risk all you have now?”

“I’m an opportunist,” I said, “You know this about me.”

“It is one of the things I know about you.”

“You’ve encouraged me to be more social.”

“Not with someone from the FBI.”

She didn’t understand. And I wasn’t going to explain to her. She disliked, obviously, my involvement with the FBI. With certain people at the FBI. She clung to this idea of me having a person suit. I suspect she is attracted to the idea of some raving thing underneath such an attractive image. It excited her. And she loved how clever she was to have spotted it. Her attraction to me is another thing I can exploit. But she was right. The FBI was a risk. And Will was a risk.

From the corner of my eye I saw a flash of colour on the wall in the moving light of the sun. A painting. Botticelli. Primavera. One of my first great works in Florence.

“Is that new? I asked, eyes unmoving from the painting.

Her eyes flitted lightly to the painting, noncommittally leaning her head back and pushing at a lock of hair, “It is new.”

“Botticelli.”

“Yes. I have an associate that deals in high end replicas of classic art.”

“It’s lovely,” I said carefully. She had no way of knowing its significance to me. I, Zephryus searching for his Chloris to make his own. Looking up to her I wondered, unsettlingly, or did she?

“There’s a very convincing Degas in my bathroom,” she said as if to brag.

This time my face twitched and with far greater effort than I was accustomed, I smiled, “It’s amazing the connections we still make with art made so long ago.”

She had no reaction to this. Maybe she knew about the Monster of Florence. Maybe she thought she could outsmart me. She didn’t know I’d already envisioned her death. I’d already seen the banquet and with whom I’d share it.

My eyes stayed on the painting. Part of my heart returned to that moment. So many years ago. I was a different man then. And like most, the years past had weight to them but no more weight than the curious regret offered to us in retrospect. When faced with such an unexpected reminder of the past, I couldn't help but think about all the choices I'd made, choices that had led me here, to Baltimore, balancing both my work in psychiatry and for the FBI with killing people. I’m not in prison. I’m doing what I love. But here, confronted with the euphoria of youth, helplessly wondered if this version of life is what I'd wanted. When I’d made my own Botticelli back in Florence, I’d thought I’d never be caught, I thought that Il Mostro’s savagery and beauty would live forever, like smoke staining the great granite walls of a church, but it hadn't; it was long past. I’ve gotten older, clever, careful; part of me knew now that I would be caught, someday, it was one of the few ways my story ended.

I grasped after the memory and it felt unreachable like something preserved behind glass and I struggled to listen to what else she was saying. The pull of the past with the present. My first work of art. A dark field and a blanket of intestine with the stars above. I felt lost somewhere in between them.

Chapter End Notes

Not giving much away yet, he's a tired cannibal, little outta sorts, eh?

Thanks for reading, I really appreciate it, this is truly one thing in my life that really fills me up, like a bowl of soup, or stew rather, too much water in soup. stew, thick, good amount veg and meat and oil of some kind, hot, almost too hot, enough to burn the roof your mouth and make you hurt and think about it, hours on or even the morning after, sort of like good sex, often both better in memory and better on the second serving. And I've lost the metaphor. How surprising.

As stated, unsure when these chapter wil emerge, a lot of this is already written, just not shinned.

Itching

Chapter Notes

> Last Hannibal had a session with Bedelia and seemingly got away with a senseless murder as we, dear reader, know his mind is succumbing to a new madness . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I dreamt I was back in the field. The sky was stretched out above me. There was no moon. Up, up, up around me were branches of trees and on my lips the cold drops of rain turning to snow. My body has settled into the earth and it's still warm from the sun and the rich, black smell of dirt and rotting leaves and life surrounds me. My body beats in time with the pulse of the earth. I sink my fingers into it. Dig my nails into the grit. It is only after I've started to drift to sleep that I feel myself start to sink further into the dirt. I feel the shift of stones in the layers underneath me and the sucking of the earth around them. I'm being drawn into it. My legs are pulled into the wet thick mud first, colder and colder as my toes stretch and strain and my legs kick uselessly through the thick mass of it. Twist. Thrash. I'm beginning to breathe in dirt. It coats and covers my tongue. I spit and bite and search for air as I lose an arm and the earth only continues to consume me. My ribs struggle to expand with the gathering weight of it all and I can only take one more desperate breath before I'm pulled down entirely into the earth. I feel myself being pulled doward still, further, and I'm gasping great lungfuls of earth and it's filling my lungs. Just as my eyes are filling with dirt I see a brilliant light above me. It's pure white, thick and pentarating with swaths of luminous gold and out of reach. Then. Darkness.

I woke up and I'm surprised there's air. I took a gasping breath and I could almost feel the wet snap of my lungs reexpanding, desperate, eternal moments as my ribs stretched and my eyes focused in the dim light of my bedroom. Fear comes next, drawing from me a soft moan for no one to hear and my body aches as if every bone has been broken, splintered, form lost by the crushing weight of rock and dirt. I feel afraid and alone and as I curl into my pillow, drawn only to something to hold onto, I can't be sure I won't be swallowed up again. There is something terribly final about the earth. Suffocating and endless.

My legs swung bare over the edge of the bed and it's not till I open my eyes that I know for sure my toes aren't sinking into warm, sinking dirt. Time moves in stuttering starts and stops, the flash of my bathroom light flickering on, the image of myself in the mirror, my hand on the crystal knob to turn on the hot water, disconnected images.

My bones are chilled and shuddering under my skin. A deep and persistent chill. I stay under the water for sometime, not sure I can get warm again, but as my hand trails down the slick wetness of my stomach my skin feels hot to the touch. My eyes rolled close just as my fingers closed around my cock. The aching was coming from somewhere deep and with each stroke I chased after release, needing, wanting, wrecked by an inconsolable race toward

completion. Every inch of my skin is drenched thick with unbearable arousal; my nerve endings are an explosion of sensations, leaving me shaking and gasping and lost in the singular moment that, still lost in disjointed time and mismatched images of grass and sky and blue too blue for the sky, my hand slams into the tile wall to hold my body up and, with a blinding, shimmering cry I came hard and fast and let my body slide to the floor of the shower. I stay there until the wisps of fantasy have left me and I can feel the sharpness of my spin against the tile.

Similarly, breakfast is eaten with ravenous hunger and I can barely stand the intense feeling of my teeth tearing apart my food, the sinking slice of my canines and the flavours overwhelming my tastebuds. I don't even put anything on a plate. I eat everything cold, standing, lost in the moment.

I'd searched papers, all the various avenues of crime reports and missing persons, credible or otherwise. Nothing. My perpetual ear to the ground had heard nothing of my crime. The messiness of it remained though. Below par work.

I'd kept the man's head. Shouldn't have. But I did. I was waiting for it to speak to me. For the memory to come back to me.

Even as I dressed for the day, settling into what felt like a new body, allowing my hands to linger over the planes of my chest, down my flanks, fingers sliding along my throat, I thought I should be more worried about it. The body reduced to a frothy pink mixture, wasted and gone down the drain. And the head in my basement. But my concern felt distant and I liked the feeling of ease that it allowed. I didn't even want to have the dinner party. Especially when what I really wanted to happen would likely not happen. The pounding persistence of knowing and wanting and fearing held itself crouched just at the corner of physicality. Tight and hot. Like the thin film over a blister pulled taunt from gathering fluids.

Routine. Routine, the day chanted and my lip curled at the thought. Comfortable automation had rusted quickly into a listless malaise. Routine jutted and shuddered forward into a worn and weathered doldrum. It's started to raise welts under my skin, repetitive motions wearing away joints and making them heavy with fluid. I can feel the irritation all the way into the lining of my gums that are flushed blood red.

But in these last months, since Jack had come to my office and asked for my help, my routine had been disrupted. This newness had run its wet tongue over the irritated flesh, carrying with it the rough scabs from my scratching and left me bare and senseless and unprepared. Familiarity had broken into a million nickeled pieces each with an edge to cut and mar and worry. All the hours of work, the lonely efforts, sleepless nights and final moments standing back in the predawn hours, waiting for even the slightest shimmer of light to show me the art I'd given to the world, all of it, felt different now. Without foreknowledge I knew with deep and lustful breaths that possibility had room for divinity and damnation. That possibility breeds and stokes fantasy. And fantasy was the start of everything.

When Will came to my office door after several weeks of not seeing him, I was working on a drawing of the field where I and the dead man had slept. I'd worn a pencil down filling in the night sky. The moment he stepped through the door the grey hues of the graphite lept into glorious colour. If his eyes were separate seas of endless blue a sudden squall would be

needless for want to drown in them. And as he passed me, quickly as he often did, his smell filled my nostrils and made me pause, having missed it like I'd known it forever, needed it forever.

The idea of Will, beyond the man that Jack meant to use and use well, had formed purposely and with a breathless finality in my mind. The man burdened with jagged perception upon which the darkest, most deviant scraps of horror and pleasure would catch was only the opening chords to a much greater piece of music. It was the idea of Will as he moved throughout the world but it was also, I admitted to myself, thoughts of our movements, now and how they could be in the future. I'd placed this idea of him ceremoniously in a corner of my mind that received no direct sunlight, up on a pedestal like a thing to keep safe, solid and formed and present from the moment I met him.

I'd sit back and stare at it like a piece of art at a museum that I couldn't touch. All I could do was watch the light play off it. And wonder, in quiet moments, was he thinking about me as I was thinking about him? When he thought of me, was it just the Ripper or did he imagine me, all of me? And yet his resistance to me, so often marked with curiosity in lingering moments followed only by pulling back and away, only made me want him more.

"I don't think it counts, catching the guy," Will said from where he is standing, hands settled at his belt as he shrugs, "He caught himself."

"An end to his story," I said from my seat. The Angel Maker. Admirable for his creativity and tragic in how brief a time he had to realise his vision.

"Yeh," he nods and, eyeing the chair opposite me, idles toward it, "He knew the way it would end. No guess work," he sat down, eyes drifting around me but not on me. I wonder if he can sense how desperately I want to share his gaze. Did the rhythm in the air change with the beating of my heart?

Do you see me?

Letting my eyes settle on the mud dried around the hem of his trousers I imagined he had just left the crime scene. Inhaling deeply I could smell old weathered wood on him, and hay, and blood.

"Was Jack satisfied?" I asked.

Will's eyes finally met mine and I sensed deliberation behind his words, "Jack seems pleased his wager is panning out."

"His wager that you would be advantageous to the team."

He smiles a stiff, tightlipped smile, "Am I?" he takes a breath that expands his chest, holding it for several seconds, "It's getting easier," he nods slightly as if confirming his own words were true, "It used to feel like dropping a boulder in a lake now," his eyes touched mine, hesitant, seeking, wanting something, "It's like skipping a stone across the surface."

“You’re worried that it’s getting easier,” I said and he nods and the vulnerability there, that he shows me in an instant on his beautiful face is something I could bathe in, “Laying yourself within the beating breast of the killers you hunt,” my mind flashes to the warm cocoon I’d found myself in in the field, “Is an undeniable and alarming intimacy.”

“I’m used to it overwhelming me. Consuming me. Drowning me,” he shifts in his seat, “Asking me to do what I do, when I don’t know how deep it can go, is something that Jack doesn’t consider. Or has considered.”

Curious, “Why do you think that depth doesn’t frighten you anymore”

He snorts a laugh, “Practice, practice, practice.”

“Do all good things require a struggle to be worthwhile?”

“Anything worthwhile is a struggle.”

“And if it’s not?”

His eyes grow distant, “Then it’s not worthwhile.”

“What then is the benefit? And to whom?”

“Jack is satisfied,” he repeats then his eyes roll to the ceiling, “And for the first time in a while it’s like I don’t, or I can’t question the benefit of what I do. I save lives.”

“Is that the only way you benefit from such intimacy?”

He looked away at this and his eyes lowered under long lashes. I was distracted by the rosy hue of his lips for a moment as he caught his lower lip in his teeth, “Is there another way?”

“For Garret Jacob Hobbs there was.”

“And look where that got him.”

“He was only saving one life.”

“And I’ve only taken one life.”

“But you’re far from regretting it. And not because it was a struggle.”

His eyebrows raised and his lips curled into something like a smile. I was circling his words he’d spoken months ago, the ones he’d said through clenched teeth so that only I could hear. He wouldn’t say them again, “I don’t know if there is a way back from this.”

“Back to what?”

He smiled and his chest expanded in a breath he didn’t let go, “My carefully constructed life.”

“I believe there is more flexibility there than you would expect.”
“It’s not how I bend. It’s how everyone else does.”

“You’re worried you will be alone?”

“I’m already alone.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm really easing into this story, I know it seems like a lot hasn't happened, never fear, mayhaps this is suspense building, isn't this how madness comes along, not all at once, but bit by bit so that you barely notice.

And Will showed up, finally! Hope you were glad to see him. The dream imagery of Hannibal sinking into the earth is based on a few things. One, Will's madness was represented by water in series one and I wanted a different element to signify Hannibal's creep into madness. And two, I randomly read about Chopin, you know, the music dude for which there are few equals, he like the piano, his last words were "The Earth is suffocating . . . have my body opened so I will not be buried alive" and though, I don't think as a result of this request, his body was buried in Paris but his heart, as it happens, was taken from his body and was put in the pillar of church somewhere in Warsaw Poland. For whatever reason these last words really struck me and I had nightmares about it myself shortly after.

Thanks to all that have read so far and are following and to all who have commented; I love to hear what people speculate, you all are such a clever bunch, so keep it coming (I'm giving a special nod to a passel of opposums who know who they are and are supportive even when they dont know they are)

Something in the Water

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: gore, violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A week passed without incident. Then two. Will was out of town and I found some peace caring for his dogs while he was away. I'd stand amongst his pack and as they lifted their noses to the wind I'd wonder as they did when and how he would return. How strange, I thought, the urgency at which I was called to assist with Will's adjustment and how quickly they rescinded that urgent need. He was catching them and as much as I was aware that he was training to catch me I was missing him all the same.

And so the missing him, where there had been no longing before, became part of my routine. It settled at the base of my spine, twisting and uncomfortable when I laid down in bed to sleep, noticeable in the dark and quiet as something that never ended and followed me to my dreams. The same dream every night. Waking with a mouthful of dirt with a fleeting, brilliant moment of light before I was consumed.

It was Monday morning and I'd been up since four. The lights flickered on in the basement and the low hum of the refrigeration units hid the sound of my bare feet against the concrete. I'd designed the basement specifically for my comfort. The lights weren't fluorescent but rather low, warm coloured bulbs that mimicked sunlight. Ventilation kept the air fresh and moving and the way the walls were built allowed sounds to be absorbed into the walls, nullifying echoes and keeping it from feeling vast and empty.

I walked past the small refrigeration unit that contained the head from the man in the field to the large walk-in refrigerator where I was thawing some special cuts of meat for the party. The party. Even thinking about it caused an instant creeping feeling of resistance that stuck hard and sharp in my throat. I'd planned it so I would feel better. Readjust. Yet all the usual fervour and excitement hinged on the invitation I'd given and the tentative promise of attendance. Could maybe make it, he'd said and not spoken of it again, and I felt that promise grow more and more distant..

When I opened the refrigerator door I was hit with a wall of freezing air and instantly the hairs on my arms stood up. The temperature was off. I went to the control panel and somehow the temperature was set below freezing. With a frosty breath that clouded out in front of me I walked across the frost coated ground, leaving warm wet prints behind me, and found to my dismay, the meat had frosted over.

If this were an omen, I thought, taking the damaged meat in my hands, then I should cancel the party. It was in four days. Exiting the refrigerator I threw the meat into the nearby sink

and leaned heavily on the chilled ledge of it, taking a moment to shiver at the sweat that had quickly frozen against my skin.

My eyes shifted then to the small refrigerator and the head I knew was inside. With gnawing, unignorable purpose I strode forward to open the door and take from its repose the severed head of the man in the field.

I placed the head on the bare steel countertop and waited for the uneven stump to stop rocking back and forth. Once motionless again, pale and lifeless eyes stared back at me. Its lips were just pulling back from his teeth making it look as if its discoloured mottled face was grinning at me.

Can you see me?

Can you hear me?

It had been a violent death. Of course it had been. Was he missing someone? Was someone missing him?

Looking down at my hands my brain flashed back to the dream and I saw my hands above me, shielding my face from dirt and reaching up toward the light as the earth pressed into my fragile ribcage and my own bones cracking filled my ears.

Stop. Took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Stop. Another breath. Held it in my lungs. Stop.

With a tired sense of routine I carefully unwrapped the remaining meat to inspect it. To see if it could work for the ill fated party. Carpaccio was meant to start slightly frozen anyway. Good enough. I slung on an apron and set to work removing bones.

I was so absorbed in my work it wasn't until I tossed a large cut of fat into the sink and, not hearing the hollow thud of metal, that I saw that the sink was full of water. Stepping to the side of where I was working I wiped my hands on my apron and saw it wasn't just water. It was muddy water. And then, as if it was waiting for a rapt audience, as soon as I had my eyes on it a dark ploom of earth rose from the drain and darkened the water to an almost inky black. The drain burped and gargled as thick mud filled the sink with great, rushing waves. I heard the pipes groan and protest the sudden invasion and frightened, I took a step backward, dropping the knife that had been in my hand.

What sounded like a whisper behind me made me spin my body around in sudden, biting panic. The head's eyes, which had turned into milk glass, were now a startling, vibrant blue, pitted with a rotten black core that was a mockery of a pupil. Mockery still was the blue of the corpse's eyes. The blue eyes of a fantasy. A horrid, disgusting mockery. The whisper had faded into the shadows and yet still its mouth gaped open as if on the edge of word.

I wrenched my eyes from the dead man and, pushing my sleeves up further with a grinding reluctance, I reached my hand slowly down into the darkened water of the sink. My fingers moved slowly through the viscous material, gritty, cold and heavy, searching for the drain and what was clogging it. Questing fingertips found the drain piled with earth. As my fingers

touched it, it seemed to gasp with pressure and at the inhale, my hand was drawn inward just as it vomited out more mud. Quickly my other hand came up to brace my body against the sink, terrified I would be pitched forward. Finally something hard met my fingers and with desperation and urgency I grabbed whatever it was and pulled as hard as I could, ignoring the sound and feel of scrapping metal until it slipped out and into the palm of my hand as I staggered backward.

It was a section of bone. From a jaw. A tooth, filled with gold gleamed as muddy water dripped out of my hand to the floor.

His tooth.

I turned to the head again and its grin had grown wider.

Wordless horror eciplsped all reason and I knew with agnozing certainly that every effort I'd ever taken to allude capture was useless because now, in a house built on murder and bones and blood I was atop a defraught throne of mounting and inevitable madness. And to the dead man it was a joke. Sick and delectable justice that was and had always been snapping and drooling at my heels. I heard whispers still, all around me, as I pressed my hands to my ears and imagine a future where I rotted away, somewhere in the same intolerable loneliness I'd always been.

Then the doorbell rang.

Piped through into the basement so it could be heard the doorbell made the lights flash red overhead.

Though I shouldn't have answered the door, though I should have gotten rid of the head, burnt it buried it, left it to rot into nothing somewhere far away from me, all I wanted was to be away from it so with a herculean effort I ripped myself from it's macabre gaze, grabbed the knife from the floor and leapt up the stairs as if monsters were nipping at my feet.

Out of the basement the air seemed cleared but as I nearly ran to the front door and swung it open I realised that my bloody apron was still on. Quickly the knife I'd grabbed was pushed up into my sleeve, out of sight. In my haste I should have noticed there was no mud on my hands, none even under my fingernails.

"Good morning!" was the cheerful greeting from the man tucked neatly into a wool coat and hat, "Sorry to disturb you, sir, I'm with Census Bureau; can I have a moment of your time?" it was said in the rhythmic way one says something for the hundredth time and only when his eyes dropped did he see the apron then, quickly, his eyes were back to my face and he doubled the efforts of his grin, "It should only take a moment."

"Census," I repeated, still out of breath, "Already?"

"It always seems closer every ten years but yes," he nodded and it was obvious the effort he was expending not to look at the evident gore plastering my visage. I paused long enough that the man's smile faltered, "Can you answer some basic questions, sir?"

Alright then, I thought, caught in the same morose humour as the decapitated head, unable to fight it, almost to the point of laugher.

I took a deep breath and, politely, stepped back, “It is my civic duty. Please,” I held out my hand that was still covered in blood and mud, “Come in.”

It was his turn to hesitate and I had to question the intensity of his training because regardless of the obvious threat and the stinking fear that was rolling off his body in acrid waves he stepped through my threshold, “Thank you,” he said, clutching his clipboard to his chest, “As I said, it shouldn’t take long. It looks like you were busy with something.”

I laughed shortly, “Only your typical Monday.”

“I hear ya; wrong side of the bed?”

“Pardon?”

His smile shook and he did not shut the door behind him, “Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed?”

“It seems I did,” I said, unable to disagree

“Well,” he cleared his throat and clicked his pen, “I’ll start off then; how many people are living or staying in his house?”

“How many people living?”

He nodded quickly, “Yes, how many living people?”

I looked down over his body, noting the detachable treads he’d worn over his boots so he could walk on the ice, watching them drip onto my floors. He was also ten kilos overweight and the skin of his cheeks was bare and pink. He smelled sweet. I inhaled deeply, thinking of the ruined, old meat downstairs, “Just me,” I answered with an accommodating tone.

“Okay,” he scribbled on his clipboard, “Big house,” his eyes wandered up the dark corners of the foray, “And do you own this house?”

“Yes. I own it.”

“No mortgage?”

“No.”

“Good,” more scribbling, “Good, good, good. Okay, uh,” he read from the clipboard and I ran my hands across my apron, trying to free the mud from my fingers. Blood rang sharp in my nostrils and hummed loudly from the man’s trilling arteries, “And your name, sir?”

“Doctor.”

“Sorry?”

“I’m a doctor.”

“Oh!” he shook his head apologetically, “Doctor then; what is your name?”

“Hannibal Lecter.”

“Han-Hannibal? Is that uh–” his eyes had gone wide, “Is that Russian?”

“Close,” I placated, not shocked by an American’s total lack of geographical knowledge.

“And you live here all alone?” he asked again.

“We are all alone.”

“Alright,” he said it quickly as if it were a door slamming shut and his cheeks had darked to a rosy hue, “And your birthday, sir?”

“Would you care for some coffee?”

“Coffee?”

“I have a pot warm. I was so distracted I didn't drink it.” This was true. Though I wanted him away from the door more than I wanted coffee.

“I really shouldn’t,” he said quickly.

“I won’t force you,” I said, “But I’m going to have a cup,” I turned and walked to the kitchen. I didn't look back to see if he followed, I just waited to hear the clicking of his ice treads on the floor. When I heard them I couldn’t help but smile with the opportunity to make things right. I saw him beautifully cut and quartered, perfect and pink and an erasure of the ugly dark and rot of the man currently clogging my drains.

I poured the man a cup of coffee. Then one for myself. He was staying in the doorway of the kitchen. Hesitant. He probably would have been more comfortable if I’d taken the apron off.

“My birthday is January 20th, 1965,” lifting the coffee mug to my lips, “And I’m from Lithuania. Not Russia.”

“Sixty five?” he repeated, happy for the moment to see me answering his questions. It soothed him enough to step forward and he took the cup of coffee with an easier breath.

“What other questions do you have for me?” I took a sip of coffee and let the warm liquid spread across my tongue, sharp and invigorating.

“How long have you lived here?”

“In this house?” I said, moving around to join him on his side of the island. He’d set his clipboard down.

“I mean in America.”

“Quite some time,” I mused and it was startling how quickly time passed, “Thirteen years maybe?” for a moment, in the time it took for my mind to wander back from a faraway home that no longer felt like home, not even in the abstract, I glanced at the open basement door and the same whisper I’d heard before climbed the stairs and itched hot up my spine.

“You’re a citizen?” he asked but I wasn’t listening, “Sir?”

“Can you hear that?” I asked him as I set down the mug of coffee and the whisper was joined by the same creaking rise of pipes straining in the walls.

“Hear what?” he set down his coffee too. The knife had warmed itself against the skin of my forearm and I felt saliva pool thick around my tongue.

“This house whispers,” I said and met his unblinking eyes, “It is, actually, quite empty,” he was reaching for his clipboard and my eyes followed his hands, “Less and less like home.”

The clipboard was drawn to his chest and I wondered if he’d concluded that this was only an awkward exchange, “You could get a dog,” he said and tried to lace his ill timed words with a cheerful tone, as if that was all I needed.

I smiled, thinking of Will’s home, of the way the sun spilled through the windows and warmed the small house in every way that my home felt cold and dark. For a bright and uncompromised moment I thought I could smell Will and hear the soft sigh of his dogs as they settled.

“I’d like a dog.” I said and let the knife slip into my hand then I plunged it into the man’s gut.

Careful at the entry point and the depth, I tore the blade horizontally across his abdomen and a great, trapped sign of relief broke from my throat. A wet hot bloom of flesh and fluids spilled from him and with a wordless cry his fingers scrambled at my wrists as if he could pull them away. Useless. His body was slow to reach a level of shock, slow to even bleed as in the limping, disjointed way all brains handle sudden trauma, he took a strangled surprised breath and asked, “What did you just do?”

I pulled the knife from him as he fell to his knees and instinctively his hands went to the heap of intestines falling from the hole I’d made. Then, because his body had caught up with him, pure biologically fueled survival allowed him to, surprisingly, get to his feet with several rasping, confused breaths.

“What did you–” came the same question as he swayed slightly and colour rushed from his face and his limbs started to shudder and shake. All the happy unfamiliar feelings of home and Will and dogs were then and inevitably, washed with bright, red, screaming blood as the rest of his guts fell to the floor through his fingers, “Oh my god,” he cried, “Oh my god,” he repeated, as anyone would when greeting their insides outside.

“Keep those in,” I instructed him, breathless again, and he gapped soundlessly at the mess on the floor and let them continue to fall, “No,” I growled frustrated, “Keep them in,” I gathered them up in my hands and pushed them back into the opening, “You very well could live.”

“Please,” he started to beg and as quickly as he had found them he lost the use of his legs again and crumpled to the floor, “Please, let me go.”

“I shouldn’t have answered the door,” I said and it sounded shakier than it should have, emotion twisting my throat and blurring my vision as I wiped the bloody handle of the knife so I could grip it easier. I felt the tears hot in my eyes as I asked, “Will there be another census worker if you are gone?”

“What?!”

“If you don’t return, will there be another one coming to my house?”

“I don't, I don’t–”

“The government is always slow to respond.”

“Please, oh my god,” he reached for me with a floating, desperate hand, “I just wanted to ask you a few questions.”

“But you were right,” I said, kicking his guts aside to kneel next to him, “I woke up on the wrong side of the bed,” I reached into his pulsing body cavity and felt for his liver tucked up into the shaking spread of his ribs. Too tight. I made a quick vertical incision for a better reach and pushed the flap of skin out of the way, “A good nutritious breakfast,” I explained as he moaned and I fingered aside the major veins and arteries supplying his liver. It was spongy and hot under my finger tips. Though most of it was well protected by the man’s ribs I pushed aside his stomach and managed to slice a palm sized piece from the liver, “That’s what I need.”

“Help me,” he was saying weakly and I wondered if I’d nicked an artery after all as his head lolled against my kitchen floor.

I fell back against the kitchen island, chest heaving as I let my head fall back too, staring at the ceiling, “I think I received the census by mail,” I confessed, “My fault for not filling it out and sending it in,” I looked at the hunk of meat in my hands and brought it to my face, inhaling deeply its rich iron scent. My stomach growled. Or was it his? “Things are just slipping from my mind lately.”

“Please,” the man pleaded and I knew it would be a slow death. Did I want to keep him around? Would he make me less lonely?

“I think something’s wrong with me,” I said to him and a deep and drowning sadness stole the air from my lungs. Because the man was dying and I would be alone again. Because I was losing my mind and no one would find it. No would want to.

As I deliberated, the man died on my kitchen floor. I realised too late, as his blood came to pool around my legs, that I was out of butter. And, bloody hands limp at my sides, I knew I couldn’t trust myself to go out and get it. Letting the piece of liver fall to the floor I found myself crawling to lie again next to a dead man.

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This man I kept. I brought him downstairs and didn't notice the gleaming metal of the empty sink as I walked past it. Nor did I notice the time and the hours that had slipped away and lastly I failed to put the rotting head of the man from the field back in the fridge. It was easier to let these things go and with it came a sense of relief. The unclenching fist that Bedelia had referenced. She wanted me to be easier on myself. Honest with myself. The truth I'd been avoiding was visible to me now, hung at a distance, wrapped in gossamer sheets and pulsing with an aching impatient need. It was wet and new and underdeveloped and needed as much blood as I could feed it. Otherwise I would never know it.

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"I didn't think, I mean I'm glad, you had an opening today. I see you next week but just really needed to–maybe we should go back to our weekly appointments? For a little while?"

Franklyn. Very much not dead and eager to fill the hour I typically reserved for Will Graham with an impromptu appointment. He'd called the day after the census worker and I hadn't left the house for over twenty four hours. The dream hadn't come to me last night.

I took a deep breath, finding unsure footing as I tried to fit the role I'd so often played, "Why are you feeling the need to see me more often?"

"Don't you think? I mean–you tell me."

"You requested it, Franklyn," I redirected.

"I'm uneasy," he said, searching for words that explained the flush across his cheeks and the racing of his heart, "And I'm stress eating again. I was being very good about that for a while and now," he exhaled noisily, "I'm just falling back into old patterns. I don't want to regress. I've made so much progress."

"We've discussed in the past what triggers your negative coping skills," again and again we'd discussed them but he enjoyed so much the rhythm of repeating them, "Are you aware of what's triggering you?"

"I'm being social?" he said it quickly and almost as a joke but his expression turned serious, brow knitted, "I'm a loner. Like you," he made a clumsy gesture toward me and I thought of the census worker I'd hung from a hook in the basement to drain as I ate his liver, "Or I mean, I just don't usually make new friends," he seemed uncomfortable, "Could it be Tobias?"

Tobias. He'd mentioned him in our last few sessions, "He is your newest friend."

"He is! And we like a lot of the same things and we have good talks but–I dunno, I just, I think maybe it's not good for me right now."

"What's not good for you?"

“I feel uneasy around him.”

“Now or always?”

“Always?” a question, he didn’t know.

“What makes you uneasy around him?”

“He’s very intense,” he nodded in agreement with himself, face in a grimace, “I think maybe he wants something more from me. More than I’m able to give,” he thought for a moment, “Do you think I could bring him here? With you?”

“No.”

“Not couples counselling or anything,” he laughed, “We’re not a couple, I just,” he scratched at his beard hard enough to raise a red welt on his cheek, “You’re right, it’s a bad idea, I’m sorry,” I let him sit in his indecision, “Maybe we aren’t a good pair. Maybe he isn’t a good friend for me. But,” he closed his eyes, “I feel like I could be a good friend to him, you know?”

“It sounds like you are struggling to communicate what you want, Franklyn.”

“Yes.”

For someone that talked so much he was rarely able to actually know what he needed or wanted and veered wildly into self sabotage before any other path purely because it was familiar, “Though you are not prepared to abandon an opportunity for companionship when you’ve already sacrificed so much time to loneliness.”

“If it’s my only opportunity?” he asked speculatively and tears welled in his eyes, “I mean, I know it’s probably not but if I don’t try, if I don’t do it, I’m just that same guy, the same failure, the same I’ve always been,” he ran a hand under his nose, sniffing with a set of his jaw, “If I just tried a little harder. Got out of my comfort zone. You know me,” he looked at me, then away, “I don’t blame other people if I’m unhappy. I blame myself because really who else is there to blame?” his breath had quickened enough to make him gasp between words, “So why do I automatically, at the first sign of resistance, just run,” his hands were raised in a helpless expression, “It feels so familiar. Like muscle memory. I had to catch myself this time and say no. No, don't run. Try. It might be worth it. Maybe, maybe this time you can be both the problem and the solution,” he caught his breath. “And I believe, really I do, that everyone is worthwhile, somewhere, to someone. I believe they deserve a friend. I believe they deserve love,” a tear slipped from his eye, followed by another *and another, the sky was not all dark* , “I believe that I deserve love,” he said, “Don’t I?”

“Do you?” I asked before I could stop myself.

His mouth dropped open slightly and he looked hurt, “Do I have to earn it?” he was skittering, losing grip on his performative optimism and vulnerable.

“How would you earn his love?” I asked and I sensed something moving in the corner of my eyes, something heaving and shifting like the exposed ribs of the census worker. I

“Well I shouldn't have to,” he rebounded, but immediately his lips pressed together and he took several shuddering breaths before asking, “Right?” he needed reassurance, “Am I not,” he stopped and couldn’t speak for a moment, “Is that just not for me? Am I not lovable?”

“You’re agonising over him and he very well could not be thinking about you at all.”

“I just,” Franklyn let his hands raise then flop into his lap, “I just want a friend that’s all. If I knew, really, that he didn’t want anything from me, just that he wanted to be with me, for me, I think, I think that would really make a difference for me.”

“Ask him.”

“Just ask him?”

“You can’t be anyone but yourself, Franklyn,” I said.

Franklyn chewed on his lower lip, his teeth dipping into the hairs of his beard and all I could hear was the scratch of hair against his gums as he thought, “We’re going out tonight. Maybe, if it feels right I can talk to him.”

Do you know who I am?

The voice came from all around me, clinging to the corners, low to the floor, loud and much more than a whisper.

Tell me who I am.

I know who you are.

Somewhere from the dark of my basement the words were spoken from black rotted lips. The skull, sitting in the dark, unaware of its skin slowly slipping from bone, spoke to me. It’s warning, the few words it could manage from decaying lips pulled tight against bright white teeth echoed in the emptiness, barely audible over Frankyln’s words yet he didn’t react. He didn’t hear them.

“Doctor?” Franklyn’s voice is barely a whimper and when I look up I’m startled, grasping after the moment that dripped with fear, “Are you okay?” he asked.

I said nothing and when he tried to speak again I raised my hand, quieting him immediately. There was no voice. No phone. No radio.

“Is this some sort of test?”

I stood and his eyes followed me to my full height.

“The session is over, Franlyn,” I said, eyes wandering the walls.

“We have twenty minutes left.”

“Leave.”

He froze.

“Leave!” I shouted and Franklyn shot to his feet and hurried out the door because I wasn’t sure I wouldn’t kill him. Because as wretched as the dead man’s voice was, what was worse was the open wound that Franklyn insisted on scratching open day after day in my office. And how now, I would have killed him for an entirely different reason. I didn’t want his pain. His loneliness. Not his. Not mine.

The dead never spoke to me. But in death, maybe, there is only truth. And no guise worth wearing.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal's bday and Mad's birth year. Works, right?

Also the keen reader may have noticed there is no Abigail in this story. Not really a place for her in it, sorry, hope no one is missing her.

There is a lot of build up happening, I know, and this chapter freaked me out especially, and as much as people tagged "Someone Help Will Graham" and want to shout "Someone Help Hannibal!" but just give it a bit, someone will come to Hanni's aid, though, maybe not who you suspect . . . and I miss Will as much as Hannibal does in this fic, I just want him there, he seems very very far away.

Thank you all who have read thus far and comment it means the utter world.

Now if you will excuse me, spring has arrived here and I think I smell earth (though this story has ruined that for me) does this mean I have to have a life again? Should I plan a trip? I want to go to Iceland; any Fannibals been there/live there?

Wine And

Chapter Notes

> Last we saw Hanni kill the census worker and after a cuddle went to see Franklyn who is as lonely as he is but then the head in Hanni's basement starts to actually talk and here we are . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I went home, finding it as cold and empty as I'd left it and bypassed the refrigerator where I would normally have a glass of wine after seeing a patient and went straight down to the basement from where the voice had come from. And there he was. Right where I'd left him. The plastic bag over his head had filled with condensation. The heat of decomposition. His eyes, no longer their unearthly shade of blue, had sunk all the way back into his skull and their liquid had spilled like tears down his cheek as his mouth hung agape and full of bright white teeth.

I became aware of my panicked breaths in the hollowness of my basement and quickly took a deep breath while tearing my eyes from the head and shutting them with a shudder. I needed to get rid of it. Now. The memory wasn't coming back. I picked up the head, intending to bring it to the sink where I'd gotten rid of the rest of it. Dissolve it away. Hear the sizzle and pop of his skull as it folded inwards, brains and bones and hair turned to mush. End this. A mistake. Messy, rotten–

Again the red light flashed suddenly over my head and I was rocked violently from musings. Don't answer it. After what happened last time, don't answer it. And I almost didn't. But then I was setting down the head and bounding up the stairs just as there was a knock at the door.

Will.

Will. All air was knocked from my lungs and I struggled to take a breath again, thoughts and fears of madness and capture stymied at the very sight of him. He was tucking his scarf closer to his throat against the wind and when I pulled open the door he took a deep breath and the frost came with it.

For a moment I wondered if he was real, terrible doubt making my voice quiver as I said, "Will, good evening."

"I'm early," he said, holding up a bottle of wine.

"Several days early."

“Insurance then, in case I cancel.”

“Are you planning on it?”

“I’m planning on the unplanned.”

“You missed three appointments.”

“Do I owe you money?” he quipped and his nose was red from the cold.

“With the wine we’ll call it even,” I said, opening the door wider, “If you won’t be making the party, we could drink it now.”

He accepted the offer by stepping through the doorway, shaking out his coat as if it were covered in snow then tugged off his hat. Almost the instant the door was closed his cheeks flushed against the warmth. Inhaling I smelled wrinkled creases of paper filled with grease, a drive thru lunch, and a hint of Jack’s cologne.

“Make yourself comfortable,” I said, gesturing toward the parlour, unable to stop a smile from tugging at the corners of my lips, “I’ll open this and find something to snack on.”

“Not hungry,” he said to my retreating back.

“You need something nutritious in your belly,” I countered, not hearing any further retort.

In the kitchen I opened the bottle and quickly put together some cheese, meat, and beautifully sweet tomatoes I’d found at the farmer’s market. The meat was thin strips of what had been a very large man. Perfectly marbled. Curred and seasoned with fennel and pepper.

My home was quiet, darkened with the setting sun. Corners of it were still filled with a chill that the heat couldn’t reach, persistent and protective. But in the distance I heard Will’s footsteps and the wine smelled good. The man in the field was a mistake. The census worker was impulsive. Uncalculated. I make mistakes. I am aware. Madness can’t thrive in the light. Its claws hook and break off at the root.

Tray in hand I joined Will. He’d turned on a lamp and was standing, bent, near my bookcase, head tilted to read the titles.

“There are no psychology books here,” he said as I set the tray down on the table in front of the couch. Two armchairs sat at right angles to it.

“This is my home. My work is separate.”

He huffed, it sounded like amusement, “I hadn’t expected Asimov,” he turned, sliding his hands into his pockets, “Robots?”

Robots. They didn’t interest me. The reconceptualization of biological emotions into emergent mechanical functions interested me. But instead I said, “It’s a first edition.”

“Science fiction, fantasy,” he said and moved with a sigh to sit in the armchair opposite mine, much like he did in my office, “There’s a particular flavour to those stories. Someone living a provincial, happy life somewhere far away from anything that goes bump in the night suddenly thrust into an unchosen destiny where they’re the only one that can save all that is good.”

I poured two glasses of wine and handed him a glass, “The precipice of all those stories is a choice that’s made,” I said and settled back down into my chair, and because it somehow felt impossible to resist or attempt to obscure I let my eyes map the contours of his face as one would reapplying pigment to a portrait. I marvelled at the shape and slope of his nose, the line of his neck and the stubble lining his cheek, almost sated for the moment at the unruly curls tucked around his ears, the very image of perfection made all the sweeter by the time lapsed since I’d seen him, “There’s always the option to choose the easier path.”

“Or the righteous path. No matter where it leads them.”

“Because their provincial life won’t ever be the same knowing what they know .”

“Was Jack my call to action?” Will smiled wryly and took a drink. He’d pushed the sleeves of his jumper up to his elbows and just under the surface of his skin the blue branches of his veins trailed up his forearm and I caught myself staring yet again, “Am I imbued with a magical destiny?’ he asked.

Gone all these weeks he had changed. He seemed sharper, sure of his words and intentional at their emphasis. The defiance he had always displayed seemed hard set in his jaw, and I replied, “You are unlike any others in his garrison.”

“My terminal uniqueness,” this made him grimace and take another drink.

“You were working a case with Jack today?”

“Interviewed more than a few string instrument experts and engineers in the Baltimore area. Nothing came of it.”
“The murder at the symphony.”

“The murder at the symphony,” he repeated and I coud hear the knash of his teeth, then, after a pause and his eyes locked with mine, “I feel like I should apologize for missing out appointments. But then they weren’t ever my idea. And this isn’t a therapy session.”

“No,” I agreed, “We are indeed doing that less and less. We’re friends talking about our days.”

He tilted his chin with a knitting of his brow, “Oh?” another smile, “How was *your* day?”

“Unfettered by the things that go bump in the night,” I lied intrigued by his teasing tone, “I’m preoccupied with my upcoming dinner party.”

“You’ve had many dinner parties.”

“True,” I said, taking a breath, “Though, I admit, I’m feeling less than inspired lately.”

“Maybe we can both belay our horse and pony shows for a little bit. I think we’re entitled.”

“Last we spoke, you were feeling more comfortable in your horse and pony show with Jack.”

“I’m being groomed,” this made him laugh, “I think I’ve read this story somewhere.”

“These killers you are catching are your training ground?”

“They’re petty,” Will said, taking a drink of wine, “Personal. Cleaving,” he inhaled and set the wineglass on his thigh, “The FBI is capable of profiling murderers. They wrote the book. Especially ones like these.”

“You’re not being challenged.”

“Correct,” he said and reached for a slice of meat and cheese, “Typical presentations. Narcissism. Victim mentality. Deep veins of anger rooted somewhere in their childhood branching into sharp, nagging corners of sexual disfunction and the inabiity to maintain any sort of interpersonal relationships. Classic.”

“A man was making angels of his victims. Is that a classic presentation?”

“How they dress it up is up to them,” he said simply.

“Curious how profiling killers always paints such a similar image,” I said, taking a long drink of wine, letting it sit on my tongue. Will had picked this wine. “So often it’s about power. Dominance.”

“I’ve never been interested in power,” he said with finality and his jaw tightened.

“Is killing always about power?”

“Usually is.”

“Over death?”

“No. Doesn’t really come down to existentialism when the vast majority of serial killers just have an itch they have to scratch or feel too overwhelmed asking a woman out for a drink; childish men who early on fetishize their own depravity and never learned to care about another human being or think about anyone but themselves,” he looked up, meeting my eyes, “Seeking power implies a deficit of power elsewhere. It’s not a position of power.”

“Jack knows that.”

“Every first year psych student knows that,” Will drank again and I joined him, “Jack is grooming me to find the Ripper. And he knows *nothing* about him.”

“But now he has you.”

“I’m his unicorn,” Will said with amusement, “He’s never been so lucky.”

“Now that he’s confident you are no longer in need of my services.”

This made him frown, “Is he?”

“I’ve watched your dogs for the last two weeks while you were away.”

“Maybe he’s decided what and who is more important to him.”

“And what’s important to you?”

This made his eyes wander, “I want to catch the Ripper,” he said it with grave conviction, “He’s not like the rest,” and he was talking about me and it made my heart swell, “He doesn’t belong.”

“The Ripper isn’t a narcissist?”

“He’s appreciative of the influence he has on the world around him.”

The raw, skinless surfaces of my intuition, torn bare by my nightmares, hot and red with sensation felt Will’s advancements as if they were a cool breath sending goosebumps up my arms. I wanted him to feel me back, wanted him to hear the knocking on the other side of the door, “Does he take pleasure in killing?” I asked him.

Will’s wine glass lingered at his lips, “Tremendous pleasure,” briefly his eyes seemed distant, “He’s not a fulltime killer. His murders are the *exhale* he takes after holding his breath too long. He’s aware at all times of the confines he’s put himself in and he salivates at the opportunity to let go, all of it, to just be fully himself in perfect, uninterrupted passion.”

“It is an itch then?”

“More than that,” he was defensive, like I was trying to invalidate something, “It’s a release.”

“His release requires blood, violence?”

“Again. More than that. His crime scenes hold their heat like bricks. They drip like sweat on sunburned skin. There is nothing more *him* than they are.”

“They are everything to him.”

His eyebrows lifted, “We all need a release now and again.”

Watched his hand tighten around the stem of his wine glass, “How do you get release, Will?”

His eyes on mine and I felt the goosebumps rise up my back, shivering across my shoulders, “I haven’t found my outlet yet,” his body relaxed in his chair and settled into the cushions and he let his knees fall apart, “Should I be looking?”

“This isn’t therapy,” I reminded him.

“As a friend then,” he said, then, with a frown, “How do you let go?”

“I take pleasure in a great many things.”

“I noticed,” he said and his eyes lingered too long and it felt for one glaring moment like he was enjoying this, flirting on the edge of suggestion, “There are probably few things you haven’t tasted.”

My lips parted, struck in the moment as my heartbeat shot into my throat, “I know what brings me pleasure.”

“Maybe that’s my problem,” he said and he leaned forward to put the empty wine glass on the table.

Our eyes met and if he was asking a question I couldn’t trust that I knew what it was. I wanted to curl into the burrow of that gaze, slip into it like it was a pool and let it cover every inch of my skin. He was so close to seeing me. And I wanted him to. Regardless of where it led me. I didn’t care. The things I could show him. Teach him. What pleasure he could feel. When had this happened? When had I become so helpless?

But I broke the moment with a thick snap of a shared inhale, curious how it would snap back, hopeful he would return to that heat, “Do you want more wine?”

He seemed to fall back against his chair and I watched him consider, “Please.”

I stood on shaking legs and took his wine glass before heading to the kitchen.

Not so loud. He can hear you.

The voice again.

Can you see me?

My feet were falling across my floor then with a sharp jolt—

“Did you hear what I said?”

Bright lights. Red. Yellow. Flashes of gold.

A hand tugged my arm and I pulled from it, startled.

“Hannibal, are you okay?”

Eyes finally focused and I’m in a crowd. The woman standing in front of me is holding a glass of wine and there’s red lipstick on her teeth.

“Mrs. Komeda,” I breathed, eyes adjusting to the lights as if I’d just emerged from a dark room. I looked down at my hands expecting to see wine glasses but they weren’ there. A champagne flute, nearly empty. Residual sweetness on my tongue told me I’d drank it.

“You looked miles away,” her hand again. Pulling at me. Stroking me.

And I was wearing a suit. I met her eyes, fighting back a wave of nausea and scattered thoughts and memories like threads worn thin and frayed. The gala this evening. An opera singer that I loved and had planned to attend.

“I may be overly tired,” I managed and felt my hands shaking. I couldn’t remember the performance I couldn’t remember how I got here.

“I could lick the sweat off of you,” Mrs. Komeda teased with a wide smile, her hand sliding to my chest. Her hands felt cold. Dead. None of this felt real.

“Doctor?”

Franklyn suddenly came into view from the cloudy edges of my vision and I managed somehow to pull myself away from Mrs. Komeda. I raised a hand to my forehead and found my hair wet with sweat. I couldn’t breathe. Gasped, tried to catch my breath, too many people, too bright.

Franklyn was standing with a man I didn’t know. They’d attended the performance.

“I’m sorry,” Franklyn said, “I saw you earlier and thought I’d come say hello. What a coincidence, we both had the same plans this evening,” Franklyn was flushed though for entirely different reasons than my own, “Doctor Lecter, this is Tobias Budge. Tobias this is Doctor Lecter.”

“Good evening, gentlemen,” I said and Mrs. Komeda looked displeased I wasn’t paying more attention to her, “I’m afraid the wine has gone to my head, if you’ll excuse me.”

“Doctor Lecter, I was looking forward to meeting with you,” the man Tobias Budge said and he met my eyes with a heavy, granite purpose. All Franklyn had told me of him, all I’d intuited from Franklyn’s experience with his friend, crystalized in one pupil dilating moment. He was a fledgling predator burdened still by his milk teeth. Regardless I could hear the screams of his victims trapped in that gaze, thrust forward in a juvenile display of pride.

“Did you enjoy the performance?” I asked Tobias. I could feel myself sway on the ground, or was it the ground moving, I had trouble making eye contact, prayed it wasn’t noticeable yet desperate to leave, get out, go home.

“I’ve neer seen anything like it.”

“Really?”

“I prefer an orchestra.”

“Tobias owns a stringed instrument shop,” Franklyn interjected with a rough clearing of his throat, “I think I told you–whoa! Doctor, are you going to be alright getting home?” Franklyn’s voice.

“I apologise,” I said, trying a smile and failing, “I hate to cut the evening short.”

“Can I–” Franklyn stepped forward and I raised my hand.

“No, please, I’ll be alright.”

I left the throngs of people behind me, out into the night, gasping great lungfuls of air as my shaking legs stretched over cold concrete. I’d left Will. When? How? Somewhere my car. Somewhere I could get back home. My hands searched through my pockets for my keys.

I’d lost time again. Again. Fool me once, I thought, drained and shivering with fever. There. My car. I’d found it once again. Safety.

I could get to the car. Forced my legs forward. Move, I commanded them. Just get to the car. Then, footsteps. I heard them echoing just behind my own. But the wind was blowing in the wrong direction for him. Another mistake born from inexperience. I could smell him behind me.

At my car door I stopped. So did the footsteps.

“Tobias,” I said. His heart rate increased, “Franklyn will be looking for you.”

“I’ve been looking for you,” I heard behind me.

“Been looking for what exactly?” I asked, turning around to see his dark form lingering in the nearby shadows.

“Do you know me?” he asked with the impossible dramatics of the lonely.

“I know you sense an irresistible weakness. And you didn’t want to miss an opportunity.”

“Do you know what I’ve done?” he was circling me. He thought I’d told the FBI about him. Franklyn talked too much. But Will had barely mentioned the case.

“You’re curious about me, Tobias,” I said and almost lost sight of him, “Has Franklyn said good things?”

“He’s an idiot.”

“That’s not fair,” I said and heard his breath quicken. He was getting ready to strike.

His body weight hit me suddenly and with startling force. I was prepared for an attack but his scrambling lunge threw me off my axis just as his hands circled my throat. He’d struck too soon and for all his enthusiasm it lacked commitment and follow through. He’d knocked me off balance but I used my ill distributed momentum to disrupt his own and he lost one foot off the ground. Quickly, feverishly, I spun him around, slamming his body into my car. He would attack forward, I went low, knocking the air from him with a shoulder to the diaphragm. He collapsed inward and sputtered a few gasping breaths, stunned long enough for me to swipe his legs from under him twist an arm around his neck. Tired and weak as I was, I used the firm surface of my car to steady myself, bearing both our weights as he kicked and twisted, trying to get out of my grasp. Block the blood to the brain. Wait for the body to go limp. Tobias threw his head back and felt the crunch of bones break in my nose and a gush of blood flooded my throat. The world was spinning around me and dark swirls were beginning at the corners of my eyes. My muscles screamed. Stop. Struggling. Stop. Stop. Stop.

Tobias fell to my feet unconscious and I collapsed back against my car.

I'm not well.

I felt my legs go out under me suddenly and I fell to my knees, gasping for air as I fight for consciousness.

I heard laughter from somewhere. It echoed on the wind with the gathering snow. I saw movement in the shadows all around me and they gathered around Tobias' body and lifted him up, forward, dark eyes filled with malicious amusement.

"The earth is suffocating," Tobias said and his mouth is not moving, his body held up as if by wires, "Make sure they cut you open so they don't bury you alive."

Fear gripped me by the throat and with a deep growl I took hold of Tobias' laughing face and, with a sharp, wet snap of his neck watched him fall lifeless to the ground.

I'm trying to stand, sure that the ground is wet and soft and I'm sinking into it when I hear, "Doctor?!"

Franklyn is suddenly a solid, heated mass in front of me and I'm shivering too hard to speak.

"Oh my god, are you okay? What happened? Tobias? Oh my god is he–" then Franklyn's hands are on me, keeping me from falling into the earth and the gnawing darkness takes me again.

Chapter End Notes

Flirty Will Graham? How dare he when Hannibal is so compromised? Should prob add a tag. I thought long and hard on some of the dynamics in this chapter, with the help of some possums, about the motives behind Hannibal killing. Pleasure? More than that? He DOES stand out because there is no motive in the classic sense. And he is a sadist but there is more there, an idea that the show is based on that is so hard to put to words. He wants to be seen so terribly, but not by anyone, by someone who can see the beauty he does. Maybe, as they spoke about fantasy stories, the killings take a different meaning now that Hanni has this new knowledge, that he maybe isn't alone; Will came in and RUINED it all. Hanni didn't need anyone, didn't want anyone now look at him!! Sigh. Anyway, i have thoughts about Hannibal as a killer and as I was helped in realizing, it's about letting go. Being truly free. Yourself.

And uh, oh, Franklyn saw a murder. What will he do? Guesses? Hehe.

Thanks again all, hope spring is coming wherever you are, let me know thoughts, opinions, feelings, I apprecaite you all.

Erosion

Chapter Notes

> We left off dear readers at the gala and a dead Tobias and a Franklyn in observance. And an ill timed, as they often are, black out, left Will and Hannibal's last meeting a mystery . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The soft vibrations of footsteps. Back and forth. Before my eyes opened I inhaled and I smelled I was home. I'm home. In my parlour. I'm lying on the couch and the only way I'm aware of my body is by the aching I feel in every limb. Consciousness brought with it muscles pulling and twisting against my bones and a steady demanding thunder in my skull, hot behind my eyes and unforgiving in its persistence. Blood has hardened and filled my nostrils, it's only when I take a breath that the barrier breaks and fresh blood flows thick down my top lip.

"Hey, you're awake," movement above me, if I could have I would have lashed out with teeth and claws like an injured animal but I could barely focus my eyes, "How are you feeling?" the voice asked.

The person stopped their pacing and came to sit next to me. Hope crested and fell as their shape and form sharpened. Features solidified and blue eyes turned to brown; Franklyn. I tried to remember when I last saw Franklyn and the gala felt distant, drifting just out of reach. I remember Franklyn. With Tobias. And I remember the sharp crunch of my nose breaking and the rain on my car and the thick snap of Tobias' neck. With another deep ragged breath, I cleared my throat of the blood and turned my head on the pillow with great effort to ask, "How did I get here?"

"I took your car," a quick, anxious response, "I mean, we took it, I drove. Sorry. I didn't drive to the gala, Tobias picked me up, my car is in the shop, way more for repairs then I was prepared to pay but I can't afford a new–you know I'd get a Bently if I could, it is an extremely nice car."

"Franklyn," I warned. His words seared and spit in my ears. My head felt like it was trapped in a vice, leaden and too heavy to lift. if I had the strength I would have choked the words from his throat before he had a chance to speak them. Franklyn who was terrified of so much. Franklyn the shaking, sniffing prey hiding in the dark spaces beneath rocks, bent and moulded by the weight of his own fears. Franklyn who adored me.

"Sorry" he responded, snapping his mouth shut.

"How did you know where I lived?"

“Where you live? Um. I’m sorry, I needed to get you somewhere safe, you were passed out I–I panicked, I just–I thought, well, what would Dr. Lecter do and I took you home I just–you wouldn't have wanted me to take you to a hospital. Right?” he interlaced his fingers, mouth open in a hesitating breath, “You wouldn’t have wanted me to call the police,” he met my eyes, “Right?”

Of course he was right. I tried to keep my eyes open, stay alert, but everything was hurting so much and my body shivered as it burned, “Where is Tobias?” I asked, needing to know.

Franklyn caught his lower lip in his teeth and his eyes were glazed with tears, “In your car.”

“My car–”

“In the garage.” a quick nod, then, almost a whisper, “He’s dead.”

“Yes.”

“You killed Tobias,” he said as if I wouldn’t remember or to remind himself, “I didn’t see what led up to it, I know he can be intense, I mean, I told you about him, I told you that I felt, well–I don’t know what he was capable of. And,” cleared his throat, “He must have threatened you. You were in trouble. I had to. I had to help you.”

“You’ve put yourself in danger,” I said, knowing he wouldn’t understand the breadth of my words.

“Tobias would have killed me. I’m sure he would have. Eventually, ” a tight, uncomfortable laugh, “He would have, you know it. You tried to warn me, I think. I don’t think you understand, Doctor I–” he set his jaw and his eyes managed to catch mine with a timid yet frantic resolve, “I don’t want anything from you, I don’t need anything, I just,” he took a breath, “I just want to help you.”

“And murder?”

“No one needs to know.”

“My house,” I said again, he hadn’t answered me, “How did you know?”

“That doesn’t matter,” he twisted uncomfortably, “What I didn’t know is if someone would be home, if you lived here alone, I mean, I kind of assumed you had someone, you know, your life seems so perfect,” he bit furiously at his beard, “You kept saying the name Will when you were in and out, I just thought, uh,” he scrubbed his face, “Oh my god, I’m so sorry, you think I just assumed. Well I mean, I did but, I didn’t think, uh.”

“Franklyn,” I warned again.

“Okay,” a quick breath out.

“I’m not feeling well.”

“I know, I know,” he said quickly, face flushed deep red, “I didn’t know what to do so I didn’t call, but I can! I can call 911. You look awful,” his eyes were wide, flitting to the side, “But then there’s Tobias. In your car.”

“Don’t call,” I said sharply and closed my eyes with exhaustion.

“Okay,” he said softly and nodded, then paused and I saw for the first time that there were wet tracks of tears down his face, “What can I do?” he asked.

I need to think. Think. I don’t have the strength to kill Franklyn. And part of me didn’t want to. “I have a medicine cabinet in my kitchen,” I said, clearing my throat that was again thick with coppery blood, “I need you to find the tablets labelled ceftriaxone and bring them to me. Then go back to where Tobias was parked,” I closed my eyes, head pounding, “Puncture his tire and take a taxi home. If the authorities ask, tell them you left him with his car waiting for assistance. You never spoke to me tonight. You saw me at the gala and saw me leave early but did not follow.”

“Okay,” he breathed, nodding, “I can do that,” his breath caught, “How do I slash a tire?”

“A knife.”

“I don’t, um, have one.”

I sighed, thinking, struggling to keep my eyes open, “There is a pocket knife in the front drawer of my entryway table. Take it.”

“Great, okay, I’ll give it back of course,” he clapped his knees with his hands, “A plan. I got it. I can do this,” but he didn’t move, frozen, “I can’t believe this is happening.”

“Tobias was a dangerous man, as you said. He already killed someone.”

“You know that for sure?”

“The FBI was already on his trail.”

He considered this for a moment, “Tobias killed that man at the symphony. He–” he pressed his lips together, “He mutilated him? I just, I don’t understand I don’t–” the words barely made it past his lips and his voice was shaking as he asked, “What kind of sick person does that? To another human being?”

“He would have been caught,” I said, maybe trying to reassure him.

He nodded, “Could this, any of it, lead back to me?”

“No,” I lied. If he was implemented I wasn’t sure he would hold up under scrutiny, allegiance or no. I would have to kill him. Regardless of him helping me. But for better or worse, there was little chance he would betray me right now. I knew that if Franklyn was anything he was unavoidably genuine and helplessly honest. And he believed, against or without better judgement, that I was a good person.

“Alright, I better get,” he exhaled a heavy breath, “Better get going. I can do this, Doctor. You can trust me,” he let his hand fall on my arm with a reassuring pat then removed it quickly, seeming to brace himself before saying, “I mean, you don’t know how much I look up to you. Really. I can’t believe this is happening but maybe, maybe this is happening for a reason. So that I can be here for you. You. Of all people,” he smiled a grim but real smile, “I mean, I actually thought Tobias was my friend,” he shook his head, “But he wasn’t. He really wasn’t. You know, he used to say my name in this way that just,” his fists clenched on his knees, “It angered me. Hurt me. So much. He said my name with this sharp k sound and a hiss at the f– like, like my mom used to, you know? Like he was just tired of me, like he just wanted me stop talking. And you know, I thought,” he laughed at himself, “I thought maybe he wanted to shine a light on the best parts of me, you know the stuff underneath,” he put his hands to his chest, “But he never really cared. Not about me. He never really *saw* me,” for a moment Franklyn was solid and sure, all quivering gone from his words, “So maybe I should thank you,” the words seemed to surprise him and several silent moments passed before he stood up, “I’ll get you that medicine,” but then he stopped, frowned, “Is Will going to be here, to take care of you?”

“No,” I said quickly and wanted that to be the end of his questions. But at his name the grinding gears of my thoughts, void now of all their fluidity like metal on stone shuddered together fragments of Will being here. Wine glasses in my hand, curious of where the evening would go, and then; gone. Blackness. Had he left here alive?

“Sorry,” Frankyln cleared his throat, bringing my attention back to him, “I just don’t want to leave you alone.”

“I’ll be okay,” I said to him, wanting him gone. Needing him gone.

Franklyn gathered the medicine and a glass of water. He set it down next to me then, assuming I was asleep again, he pulled the blanket back up around my neck and one of his hands came to rest for a prolonged moment on my shoulder, squeezing slightly. He turned out the light as he went and I heard the sound of him gathering the knife from the entryway.

Quiet again. I reached for the pills next to me and with great effort took one with water. I settled back down into the cushions. Just a few minutes. Then I have to make sure Will is alright. When I opened my eyes again I groaned and pushed the sweat soaked blanket from my body and shouted at my limbs to move, begging myself to stand and check, but instead I sunk heavily into the earth and could not stay awake.

***

There’s dirt in my teeth. The ground is soft, wet, full of tangled roots that reach for me as I descend. I can feel the smoothness of them as they pass by my fingertips, out of reach, slipping past me through the mud, around my throat, purposeful and slow like all things that grow. The roots tighten around my wrists, cutting off circulation and they encircle my waist and twist around my ankles. I’m losing sight of the light above me as earth surrounds me and my gasps of breath are welcomed by mouthfuls of thick mud filling my throat, my ears, eyes. I’m conscious and awake, twisting against the iron hold of the roots, aware I’m being filled

with earth and unable to even scream. I shudder and shake and become a part of it, sinking down, down, down . . .

I wake up from the fitful sleep, dragging behind me strips of the dream like broken flesh. My eyes adjust to the darkness and there is someone standing in front of me. I know his face. Only lit by a distant light from the windows for a moment his eyes refract the light like a predator's eyes.

"Will," I said and I can feel myself trying to reach him and again my body isn't responding as it should, nothing is working. My home is totally dark except for the moon shining through the windows. I can hear a clock ticking and smell the sweat soaking my clothes and it's the only way I know this isn't a dream. My pupils are blown and searching the darkness as I ask, "What are you doing here?" and it's a barely audible rasp.

"You're sick," the shape said and he was suddenly closer to me, moving like a shadow, "I wanted to be sure you were okay."

"Where did you go?" I asked weakly.

I felt his hand on my damp forehead, "You're warm."

"I had a terrible dream."

"It's still on you," he said and his fingertips traced the line of my temple.

"I didn't know where you were," I said as he pushed some damp hair behind my ear.

"I didn't like the way we left things," he said. He was kneeling on the floor next to me, skin pale and blue in the moonlight. His hand was cool on my face and I leaned into his touch. Like a wave of cool water he rose toward me and in the dark I couldn't see his expression as he leaned down and carefully placed his lips against my cheekbone. It felt like rain.

"Will," I heard myself say in barely a whisper, my words lingering with the unasked question; what are you doing?

In stillness he slowly and with the same purpose and intent he had had earlier, kissed me on my lips. His lips breathed cool air into me and with a shiver I leaned my head back and let him wash over me. As his cool tongue parted my lips my fevered hand reached to touch his face and as I pulled him closer to me the heat drained away from my skin and my body shivered.

Will moved as water would and I moved with him. He was persistent and unending, treacherous and beautiful, shrouding me as the ocean does all the drowning. He'd taken the fever from me and as our bodies pressed together he washed away the pain and filled me with the sound of his heart as the tides. I think he tasted like the sea and I wanted to touch every part of him but he seemed to crash and break against me. It wasn't until I found the pulse at his neck with my teeth, connecting our bodies as they fell together into the depths that I heard him not as the rush of water. He moaned with each shift of the tide and in one fluid motion I felt him fill me and he flowed deeper into me than I've ever allowed anyone. He moved with

me, holding me to him and I'm lost in the blue. I can hear our quickened breaths and the turbulent sea crashed forward and spilled into a million directions. In the cold and consuming waters I felt finally at peace. Pain was scored away by his lips on mine, kisses I drank greedily and all I could feel, all I wanted to feel was the slide of water down my chest and the rise and fall of his body above mine. The wet tendrils of our hair tangled together in the bracken and our limbs strained against the ebb until with the same building pressure of the ocean cresting the shore Will released and I tumbled helplessly with him.

We remained together, unmoving until the water was still. He slipped out of me and we lied entwined with the moon shining off our lilting waves. The only heat that had returned was the feeling of his breath against my skin and the rhythm of sleep as I kissed him.

"Sleep, Hannibal," he said and I followed him there, tasting the salt on his lips.

***

I woke up with a start. My hand reached out to palm the empty surface next to me and it's still warm. I leaned my head down and inhaled deeply. My eyes rolled back in my head and I curled into the smell of him. I was pushed deep into the cushions of the couch. Alone. Will hadn't stayed. The bitterness of my loneliness twisted into a rising nausea and I kept my eyes closed, waiting for it to pass. I hadn't expected him to. And I didn't feel angry.

My fever had broken. I sat up slowly and let the blanket fall around my hips and my eyes wandered over the remnants of my suit on the ground. As my eyes linger sleepily on it I could feel my shirt being pulled over my head and then the cool plane of Will's chest pressed into mine. I could see his face bathed in moonlight, lips parted. I could feel his hand locked against my hip bone and hear our conjoined moans as he guided himself into me. I tried to freeze in resin the memories, praying I won't lose them. Absently, my hand lifted up to my stomach and I found a sticky batch of dried semen there. I brought my fingers to my mouth and the musk of him made my nostrils flare as my tongue circles my fingertips. I can breathe from my nose but it is swollen and painful. I haven't even looked at myself but imagined plooms of red and purple.

With effort, I threw my legs from the couch and the moment my feet touched the ground and I'm standing, like fragile glass, all the carefully preserved memories of Will threatened to break under the avalanche of memories of the gala and Tobias. Franklyn sitting with his hands clasped around his kneecaps with white knuckles. Tobias dead in my car. Thankfully it was cold out. No chance of a smell.

It's still early in the morning and the light was dusky through the windows. I found my pants and pulled them on before retrieving a robe from the closet. I pulled it over my aching body and smiled at the fact that not all the soreness is bad. I wondered what Will was feeling. Wondered if I'd left any marks on him.

I took another tablet from the bottle on the table. As I headed for the bathroom and a shower the doorbell rang.

Leave it, I think.

Then again. Followed by knocking.

I'm a careful monster and learn from my mistakes so I checked the peephole and see Jack standing outside. I cinched the robe closed and ran a hand quickly through my hair before opening the door.

"Jack," I said into the frigid air and my pupils shrunk to pinpricks at the change of light.

"Doctor," he said and then, seeing my face, asked with concern, "Doctor, what happened?"

I raised a hand to my nose, "Apologies," I said and regardless of my comfort at lying, especially and most happily to the FBI, I was distracted and my mind was sluggish, "I didn't have time to clean myself up."

"Who did this?" was his thundering question.

"The police report is filed, Jack," I dismissed and stepped back, pushing the door open to invite him in and close out the cold, "I interrupted a car thief last night after leaving an event. I'm alright."

"Are you sure?" he stepped through the door, taking off his hat as I pushed the heavy door back into its frame.

"The FBI is hardly concerned with a carjacker."

"Next time don't be a hero," he said and he shifted from foot to foot, not intending to come in any further. I didn't want him to. He cleared his throat, "You weren't answering your phone. I needed to contact you."

"What is it, Jack?" I asked. Jack's shoulders were hunched as if he had taken on too much weight and the burden was threatening to break through my floor.

"Were you home last night?"

"Yes," I said too quickly, then, "No."

"Which is it?"

"I was at a performance. But left during intermission. I wasn't feeling well so I came home."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

His eyes dropped down for a moment and I was terrified he could see something on me, smell something on me. Jack looked back up to my face, his jaw tightening, "Have you heard from Will?"

I blinked, swallowed, still tasting blood, "Yesterday. He stopped by after cancelling several appointments. From being on the road with you."

“Will and I were in West Virginia today.”

Today? My eyes flitted to a nearby clock. Seven at night looks an awful lot like seven in the morning, “Oh?” I managed.

“I lost track of him in West Virginia.”

As I lost track of this day, I thought, but said with concern, “Lost him?”

“We were following a lead on a case. He went off script.”

“And you don’t know where he is now?”

“He hasn’t contacted you?” Jack regarded me with a lengthy pause, “In a professional capacity, or otherwise?”

“What happened?”

“I’m sorry, Doctor,” he took a breath, “I can’t tell you specifics. Will you let me know when you hear from him?”

“Of course,” I said and he put his hat back on. This was not a social call. He would take his burden and go, empty handed.

“It may be broken,” Jack said as he turned, then gestured toward my face, “Your nose.”

“Good thing I’m a doctor,” I said, attempting a smile.

“Good thing,” he said and with a grunt of effort he shifted his weight again and I became aware of the smell of blood. Not my own. It was fresh and pressed into smooth white gauze somewhere on his body. “You take care of yourself, Doctor,” he said and left without another word.

I took a moment at the door. I waited until I heard his car engine start then move down the street. Jack’s bloodhound had run away from him. They weren’t supposed to do that. Had I caught his hound’s scent, he wondered, had he come running home bloodied or with blood on his teeth.

I walked heavily back into my parlour and as I did I removed the robe I’d just put on. I threw it over one of my chairs and couldn’t help but sigh at the sight of my new suit crumpled on the ground.

I’d just had the suit tailor made. *Another black suit,* my tailor had asked, *your measurements haven’t changed* . His arthritic hands had thumbed the roll of measuring tape at his belt and I’d thought I’d like to look inside his hands. See the cartilage worn away from years of repetitive motion like the malformed shoulder of a gladiator curled up in an unmarked grave.

“Not black,” I’d said, reaching to stroke my fingertips over a roll of dark wool fabric. Out of the sun it looked pitch black. But when the light hit it the cloth swallowed the blue from the

sky and pulled it into twilight. It was the richest blue I'd seen. Until the field. And I'd bought it hoping for Will to be there. But now maybe that didn't matter.

There would be no dinner party. I would cancel. All the meat would go bad. Can't freeze it. Not again. Once the frost set in, tiny crystals bursting, there was no saving it.

I would clean the suit, I decided. What blood was on it was mostly mine. I would spend the evening taking care of Tobias. After I showered. I longed for the comfort of my shower upstairs, just off of my bedroom with deep forest green tiles, but my feet carried me downstairs to my basement. I'd installed a solid concrete shower stall in the corner of my basement. The best for washing away evidence. As the water ran cold to hot I thought of Will slipping out of my home early in the morning just as what was left of him would spill down the drain.

As the water rushed over my sore body I worried that all those moments and all else I had so carefully organised in my mind were slipping unavoidably into disorder; I wouldn't be able to find them, they'd scatter and fade.

I dried myself and though there wasn't a mirror down in the basement I passed my careful fingertips over the bridge of my nose, searching for the break. It was minimal but with a deep inhale, closing my eyes, I forced the bones and cartilage back into a line with a glaring jolt of pain that made me reach for the wall to keep from collapsing.

I wrapped a towel around my waist and was about to head upstairs when I noticed something missing. Just in the corner, where I had left it before my blackout, the head of the unknown man in the field was gone. My eyes quickly scanned the floor as if it had tumbled from its perch. Nothing. Over cold concrete I searched the rest of the basement but the head was nowhere to be found.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry a day late on this, not that I'm holding myself too hard on deadlines. Guess what?? It snowed here again! Was I hoping for spring? Yes! Was it thwarted??! Yes!!

I know people have mixed feelings about Franklyn, I know, but the idea of him coming to Hannibal's aid, of being Hannibal's hero, seemed so possible and so adorable and sad that I had to write it. Some people find him annoying but I would challenge anyone to observe themselves in a therpy session and not catch at least a wiff of annoying . . . I like him. And maybe, who knows, maybe he will live in this story, who is to say.

Changed the tags a bit as well, just a little Bottom Hannibal supremacy, not that this author is taking any stances on that *ahem*

Misjudgment

Chapter Notes

> Last we saw the head had gone on a walk about after Water Nymph Will paid Hannibal a visit and maybe those antibiotics are helping, maybe . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You're quiet today."

"Am I?" my eyes went again to her Primavera painting. The colours seemed to bleed from it into the grey of the walls and her words seemed distant as if spoken from acros a great distance.

It was the next morning and I'd bid Tobias farewell by way of clean cuts and bubbling acid and slept another night all the way through without nightmares. Will hadn't called. I hadn't called him. The bubble would burst if I did maybe, maybe I wasn't ready to let go of this feeling. Maybe Will wasn't. We crept cautiously through this space both wondering if it was a mistake and unwilling to answer.

"Did something happen?"

I lowered my gaze, letting the negative image of the painting pulse in the unfocused space, finally answering, "I'm struggling with a patient."

Her eyelashes flickered, "Oh?"

"I'm concerned about boundaries."

"Yours or the patients?"

"Both," I said honestly, then, "I shared more than I intended to with him."

"That suggests it wasn't therapeutically intentional."

"It was not intentional."

She breathed in and I looked up to her face, if only to see the fragility she fought so hard against showing, "How did he receive it?"

"I'm concerned it damaged our therapeutic relationship. Though It was tenuous to begin with."

“You can’t take back a disclosure. You can only try to benefit from it or,” she paused to emphasise her point, “Cut your losses.”

“I am rarely in this situation. Or rather I’ve never been.”

“It seems you’re struggling with more than just your patient.”

“Am I?” I asked again.

“If this were a simple question of countertransference then I’d advise you to reflect, repair and proceed. But I think you know that there are situations when we can not be clinically effective, regardless of our feelings.”

“Then I should end it.”

“Yes,” she said a little too quickly before pursing her lips and saying slowly, ”I know you were looking for something, Hannibal,” and the compassion she was attempting and failing at conveying only gouged my already frayed composure, “And as badly as you want it, there is no good outcome.”

“And yet here I am.”

“The world didn’t end,” she confirmed, “But we can’t use our office to satisfy our needs.”

“I can make a referral then.”

“Good,” she seemed relieved, brow furrowing, “It’s your choice to end it,” this was said with some determination, “You can correct a misjudgment.”

“I know,” I said, and thought of sweat soaked sheets and the sharp hack of a cleaver through bone and meat and a missing head, “I’m not feeling myself these last few weeks.”

“Tell me about it,” she said, yet I could taste the caution in her words.

“I’m having dreams.”

“Dreams?” she paused and in that space I could feel the sinking cold of mud all around me and the panic as it filled my throat, “What sort?”

“The kind that linger when I’m awake.”

She gave my words room to move and take shape, “Do you remember them?”

“I remember a light above me,” I said, shifting my legs as if to reassure myself the floor was solid underneath them, “And it’s out of reach.”

“Like your patient?” she asked and I looked up at her sharply.

“Is that a familiar feeling to you?” I asked and felt the pulse at my neck. And hers.

She levelled her gaze, “Light can both blind us and illuminate things we’ve kept hidden.”

“Is that all it does?”

“You crossed boundaries with a patient, Hannibal,” she said, “And you appear adjigated.”

“You’re accusing me now?”

“You said it yourself.”

“What did you think I did, Bedelia? Or should we continue to obfuscate.”

“Only, I’d think you’d have more control.”

“And if I lost it entirely?”

“You’d put yourself in danger.”

“And you, actually.”

Her face twitched, “Would it surprise you to hear that Jack Crawford stopped by my office?”

“For an appointment?”

She wasn’t amused, “For all my talk of boundaries I may be forced to put down a firmer foot regarding our relationship.”

“You’ve tried,” I said, then, “And what would it look like to Jack if you suddenly recuse yourself?”

“Perhaps,” she said with a breath and she drew herself inward, “Like I’m correcting a misjudgment.”

Jack was spreading his tendrils out and around Will Graham. He wanted to see what things felt like. Wanted to know their shape and how much and how long he could squeeze before they broke, “What did he ask you?”

“If he could trust you regarding Will Graham.”

“Really?”

“In so many words.”

“I have no allegiance to the FBI.”

“And you do to Will Graham?” she raised an eyebrow, considering my silence with a curl of her lip, “He must really be something. He’ll destroy you, Hannibal. Utterly and completely.”

The baying of the hounds and the eruption of my horrors onto the clean marbled surfaces of my life suddenly seemed so much more manageable considering this, considering him, considering how much I could lose if he was there, and I almost smiled, “Maybe that’s okay.”

This seemed to anger her further and her lips smacked as she parted them, “Or maybe he already has.”

“No,” I said honestly and took a breath before sitting forward, the first feeling of calm washing over my senses for the first time in days, “He will save me,” Will had carved out a place in my heart and the empty space left was something I couldn’t ignore when I now knew what could fill it. I knew that Bedelia couldn’t understand. He’d been kin. Survival had been our shared meal, our creed, our strange sort of trust. She had outlived her usefulness for me because she was small, she had no idea what I felt, what I needed. I had lost sight of myself and through fever and nightmare and murder I’d found something to fight for that wasn’t me. I owed her the truth, if anything, knowing she would consider it as a nebulous thing, as hers was. I met her eyes, seeing the tears at their corners, “Because I don’t think I know what’s real anymore. I’m not afraid of the FBI. There are worse things, truly terrible and irrevocable things to be afraid of and I will savour every lucid thought I have left,” I stood, draping my coat over my arm, “And now I’m in need of a new psychiatrist,” I gave her frozen form one last look, took a few steps and for whatever residual reason I turned back and said to her, “If you feel there’s a dark shape following you, or hear something moving in the night, don’t open your door Bedelia, and don’t try and run, it will only make whatever it is more hungry.”

“Hannibal,” she called when I was at the door, “I will not be reachable for our appointments any longer. In fact I won’t be reachable at all.”

“Thank you,” I said quietly and left. She wasn’t leaving for me and it wasn’t lie Jack couldn’t find her wherever she went but it would give me time.

***

On the drive home I couldn’t shake the feeling I was being followed. Every glance in the mirror reflected a potential tail, every person whose eyes to look as I waited at a stop light were agents keeping tabs. They would follow me until I slipped. Until blood pooled and leaked and someone, another someone, went missing. I thought of the head, almost missing its voice because then I knew at least where it was, and thought of the field and when this all began.

I took a winding, nonsensical route back home. It took twice as long and I had to pull over a few times to catch my breath, too many cars with tinted windows meandering, I needed to be sure. When I was back home, finally, I was shaking and feverish again. I had to lay my head on the steering wheel for a moment before getting out of the car. I shouldn’t have gone to Bedelia.

Franklyn was sat on my back doorstep. When the garage door opened he stood, catching himself on the stair, stumbling a bit on the ice before a smile spread across his face.

“Franklyn,” I said cautiously.

“I just,” his shoulders raised against the wind, “I called your office and no one answered and then came here and you weren’t home so decided to wait,” when I didn’t move he exhaled sharply, “I shouldn’t have, I’m sorry, I just needed to make sure you were okay.”

“I’m better thank you,” I said and at his dishevelled appearance I advanced forward, “Come inside. You can warm up.”

“Thank you, oh god, thank you,” he shivered and stepped back so I could open my door. He followed me in, stamping his boots on the rug, “I’m glad you’re feeling better. You look better.”

“Did the police come talk with you?”

“Police? No.”

“The FBI?”

“No!” he snorted, “I don’t think they have anything to link me to Tobias. Not even a ticket to the gala. I was just his plus one.”

I took my coat off, hanging it on the hook. My home was dark. Franklyn took his coat off too and when I moved to the kitchen he scampered after me like a dog.

“Tea?” I asked.

“Sure!” he responded quickly, “Earl grey?” he asked with an accent, after which he laughed at himself, then shook his head, “Whatever you have.”

I said nothing. Just filled the kettle. I was more curious how he was coping.

“Is Tobias gone?” he asked after a moment.

“Yes,” I said quickly.

“Is it . . . that easy?”

“Easy? No.”

“But there’s nothing left of him. No one could find him? Parts of him?”

“No.”

“You seem pretty sure.”

“I am.”

“And you seem pretty calm,” he said as I set a few mugs on the counter. He had remained where he was, rooted to the ground, “You took a life. I can’t,” he took a breath that caught halfway up his throat, “I can’t stop thinking about it. I know he was,” he shook his head, “Like I said, I know he was dangerous but you just killed him.”

“You said you wanted to help me, Franklyn.”

“I do,” a gasp, “I do, I really do, but I’m just, I’m just scared. I don’t know how to move on. I keep seeing his face. His dead face. It’s there when I try to fall asleep, when I close my eyes.”

“Are you going to go to the police?”

“No!” he shifted, paused, “Unless you think we could say it was self defence. I dunno.”

“The body is gone, Franklyn. We can’t go to the police after having disposed of it.”

“I didn’t touch him,” he said quickly.

“You’re an accessory,” I said, “You transported the body.”

“Both of us were so overwhelmed. You weren't feeling well. It makes sense, it would make sense, we panicked. I panicked. I don’t do this. I couldn't. I can’t just forget he was here. And now he’s not. If you talk to the police, you can tell them, all of it, it was just a mistake. We have to own up to our mistakes. Otherwise who are we, right? We can’t change what happened but we can try and make it better.”

“We already did,” I said, “Tobias is dead.”

“Okay,” he scrubbed his face with his hands, “Can I just have a minute?”

But of course Franklyn was falling apart. Of course he was. His confidence was short lived and now, the weight of things was drawing on a short reserve of strength and anger toward his friend. He was a liability. He was a risk. He could ruin everything.

I moved around behind him to a cupboard over his shoulder, “Take a deep breath, Franklyn,” I instructed as I withdrew a tin of tea and set it on the counter.

“Okay,” he said and drew in a lungful of air through his nose.

“Out through your mouth,” I told him.

He expelled the breath.

“Again,” I said and turned to wrap my fingers around the kettle.

He breathed in, letting it out a moment later, his chest shaking, “Okay, okay, it’s okay,” he recited.

“It’s okay,” I repeated and lifted the kettle over my shoulder, “As I was recently told, it’s never too late to correct a misjudgment.”

“I feel better n–” he was about to say as the kettle cracked down onto his skull. The blow knocked his legs out from under him and as I stood behind him I watched his body crumble and his forehead smack into the countertop on its way to the floor.

Jack. Bedelia. Franklyn. They swarmed and roosted at the eves of my paranoia and the scratch of their eager claws on their perch set my teeth splintering.

Franklyn was still alive. Breathing. Blood poured from his head onto the floor, beautiful and bright as it could only be for a short while. I set the kettle in the sink and considered what to

do. I hadn't thought this through. Another body I didn't want to deal with.

I took off my waistcoat and tie and set them on the counter then knelt on the floor. I stooped to lift Franklyn enough to throw his arms over me and position my shoulder at the middle of his dead weight. Grabbing the fabric of his trousers I lifted with my legs and picked him up. He groaned and gurgled and made a sound as if he would throw up. Down we go, Franklyn, I thought, you wanted to know me. Down, down, down. I carried him all the way into the basement, in a back room that had restraints and a bed and a sink. Restrained him. Caught my breath. I looked over my shoulder and with a sigh put two fingers to his neck. Pulse was steady. Stronger than he looks. As I've always tried to tell him. Quickly, and with no clear intentions on the future I put together a quick pressure bandage and wound it tightly around his head. And that would have to be enough. Had he taken a taxi here? I hadn't seen a car. Was his car still in the shop as he'd mentioned? A shaking hand to my brow wiped away a cold sweat.

Franklyn would be out for some time. Might as well have that tea. Though all this hadn't spared yet another shirt. Soon the blood would turn sludgy and brown and begin to rot. Nothing could substitute the hot, thick smell of fresh blood in the air. I could have bathed in it. I have. I took off my shirt. I'd gotten those plastic suits made for a reason. I hadn't counted on losing my mind so quickly otherwise I wouldn't have ordered five of them.

I left the light on for him downstairs, remembering he'd told me he was scared of the dark as a child, and went back upstairs.

My phone rang when I reached the top of the stairs.

"Hello?" I answered, licking some blood from my hand.

"Is this a bad time?" Will asked on the other line.

"No," I answered, believing no time could be, "I was hoping to hear from you."

"Yeh, sorry, I got pulled away quickly by a case."

"So I gathered," first hesitantly, then with some confidence, "I was worried you may have been feeling some regret."

"Regret?" he seemed amused by the word, "I'm comfortable where we are," he considered this, "Not where we started off."

"Certainly not."

"Which is why I called."

"Oh?" fear strained the flesh of my throat.

"I'm not sure what I need right now, a therapist or a friend."

"I'm either," I answered, swallowing through the tension in my throat, "Though I believe we strayed from professionalism."

“Maybe we did,” he said through a clenched jaw, “Something went wrong with the case.”

“I know,” I said and leaned my tired body back against the counter, “Jack has already been by to see me.”

“He came looking for me?”

“He’d last seen you in West Virginia. He wanted to know if I’d heard from you.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That I’d seen you the day before. He doesn’t need to know anything else.”

“I’m on suspension,” he said after a moment, “Or at least, I imagine I am. I’m just getting back home and had my phone off. I have ten missed calls from him. Alana. I have to give a formal statement but I don’t know what to do.”

“What happened? I asked.

“Killed an unarmed man,” he said shortly, “He’d killed many more and was looking for an easy retirement. I gave him one.”

“You shot him?”

“No,” he said tightly.

“Jack tried to stop you.”

“I may have hurt Jack too.”

“Why did you kill him?”

“I don’t know,” he said and his voice was cut short, “He messed up,” the other end of the line was silent for some time. I saw him in his house, saw him sitting with his dogs, barred against the world, winded from running. When he finally spoke I heard the words as they hissed past his teeth, “He’d lost it all. In just a second. And I was angry. Angry because he’d taken the easy way out.”

“You were overcome with emotion. It’s hard to act rationally.”

“Jack wanted me trained. I’m not. I’m barely on leash anymore.”

“Give your statement,” I advised, “Let them do their paperwork. In the end they care that a killer was disposed of.”

“Am I losing it?” he asked and I almost had to laugh.

“No,” I closed my eyes, “You’re far from losing it.”

“Hope so,” he managed a weak laugh and I imagined him scratching behind one his dog’s ears, “Home used to be enough. Dogs used to be enough. Now I’m not sure what I’m holding

onto.”

I felt myself slide to the ground next to the pool of Franklyn blood and said quietly, “Me.”

He was silent and I strained to just hear him breathe, “I’ll call Jack.”

“Do you want me to come over?”

“Are you feeling better?”

“Marginally.”

“Last I saw you looked terrible. You told me you had an appointment with someone and I thought you were joking.”

My heart skipped a beat. My lost time. The image of empty wine glasses flitted across my eyes. My feet across the floor.

“After we had wine,” I shakily confirmed as casually as possible, chest rising and falling quickly.

“We’ve drank in sessions before.”

“You were called away that night to go to West Virginia.”

The earth shifted and splintered under me with a cavernous groan.

“Bad snow storm didn't make it any easier.”

“I had a dream about you,” I said and he would have no idea what that meant.

My hands sunk into the tile of my floor that broke away under my palms like wet paper. I watched the ceiling as I fell away from it and my feet no longer had any purchase as the ground erupted around me.

“Hannibal?” I heard on the phone but it was swallowed up with me.

“Hannibal?!”

Chapter End Notes

I adore Bedelia and Hanni banter, I write it often enough I guess. I could have had ten more scenes of them togehter in the first series. And for anyone who is concerned Franklyn is still alive in the Murder Basement, poor sod.

And I'm sure some of you guessed, Will was not actually there, they did not have sex and this shattering event may be a tipping point for Hanni, I think he's close to the end

here folks. And well, Will is home now, and that will make a difference. I was intending for the West Virginia case to be the totum pole murder guy; not that the man living with regret at the mistake of killing his own son wasn't a good enough ending but for this story I needed Will to crack a bit. And I myself wanted more from that episode, just something, something more to the message, not sure what.

The end is near, readers, be thou not afraid, no harm will cometh onto thee . . .

Baying of the Hounds

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the break in updates, things came up, family things, hope everyone is having a good spring so far! Last we saw Hannibal he had gone to see Bedelia, she recused herself, ahem, and then Franklyn got his head bashed. Oh and Hannibal realized he'd hallucinated Will's late night visit and that was the last, as they say, straw.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Get up.

You're sinking.

Get up.

There's a knife in my hand. My hand tightens around the hilt as the other wipes mud from my face, away from my eyes.

Do you hear that?

Car doors. Heavy footsteps alongside the house. I'd fallen and rose from the depths with great, gasping breaths, washed up against the wall of my kitchen and holding onto a shelf as the earth hungrily pulled at my feet.

You're surrounded.

I hear the sounds of guns being cocked and the restless heartbeats of dozens of faceless men. Somewhere the shattering of glass. With a strangled cry of effort I pulled my legs from the sucking mud and rose, hand over hand up the shelf, my blade clamped between my teeth.

And there.

The headless man from the field stood, his head tucked to his side under his arm. Standing over me.

You can't run, he said.

This is how they'll find me. This is how my story will end. He was just a madman, they'll say, caught under the weight of it, snapping and biting in the trap of his own making. I can see the hole they'll throw me in. Down into the darkness where I'd live with the same nightmare every night forever. I imagine the last time Jack will come to see me, descending the dripping stairs one last time just to be sure. The grey in his beard denoting the years past and the short, pitied huff as he leaves me in my grave.

And Will. I won't even remember his face.

"Doctor Lecter?" the voice is distant and when I look up again the headless man is gone and the sun is blocked from the windows.

"Hello? Are you up there?" the voice twists and fads up the stairs, "Doctor Lecter?" it is more urgent now.

Franklyn.

As I stood, my feet slipped on the wet earth and I grasped at the walls to keep my footing. The walls started to shake with the fists and shoulders of men coming to slay the monster as I threw shut the basement door behind me and descended the stairs, missing several, falling to my knees at the bottom.

Franklyn had gone quiet but I could hear him whimpering somewhere in the distance, in the dark. When I find him he is alert and awake with a wash of blood down one side of his head, regardless of the bandage now soaked in red.

"Doctor," he exhaled, "There you are. I'm-I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to bother you at home, I really really won't go to the police. I just want to go home," his words shook, "Please."

"Police?" I almost laughed because I can hear them above me, the hiss of smoke bombs and the knashing of teeth and the scraping of claws.

"Just let me go and we can move on, pretend none of this happened."

I set the knife down on the table next to his leg and he strained against his restraints. With a sigh I met his eyes and they were clouded with tears, "I should fill this basement with concrete."

"You could!" Franklyn said encouragingly though I could hear the rattling of the metal bolts as he shivered, "Let's just get out of here first."
"We can't," I said and swallowed thickly, as I ran my hands through my hair that was caked with mud, "It's too late," I looked at his face, pale with wide eyes and he is biting his lip to keep it from quivering, "Franklyn, we might not see each other for some time," I placed my hand over his, "I didn't get a chance to make a referral."

There was a pause and all I could hear was my heartbeat, then he asked quietly, "Where are you going?"

"My life is not perfect," I said resolutely, "I'm not who you think I am."

Franklyn breathed several shuddering breaths and his hand tightened around mine, "Whoever you are, it doesn't matter, whoever you've been doesn't mean you can't make a different choice now, right? I can help you. We can just do it together, okay?"

"I don't want to kill you," I told him, looking down at the knife on the table.

“Then don’t,” he is trying not to beg, “I think,” his voice cracked and shattered, “I think maybe you are a little confused right now and I get it, okay, I understand, I am too! I feel overwhelmed. I feel like none of this makes sense. But, but I’m not going anywhere, I’m here for you, like I said, I just want to help. And,” he paused, “I think you need a little help right now, right?”

I frowned and felt tears hot in my eyes, “You’re my psychiatrist now?” I wiped my eyes, “My last psychiatrist left me quite suddenly.”

“I know how that feels!” Franklyn exuded, “Believe me. But you know, you told me this. The brain is infinitely plastic. Remember?”

I let out the breath I’d been holding and as a mirror Franklyn did the same, “If I let you go will you do me a favour?”

“Of course!” he is almost crying now, “Anything, just tell me.”

I thought the words would come easy but they had to be carved with shaking arcs of a dull blade from my heart, “Tell Will,” I struggled again and my shoulders were shaking with each gasping breath. I want to say, tell him that I love him, that I will love him, that nothing would change that, nothing could. Wanted to tell him that his love destroyed me. That I’d sit in a cell until the only thing left alive was my love for him, “Tell him I would love to see him sometime.”

Franklyn nodded profusely and finally said, “You got it! I will tell him, I will.”
I picked up the knife again and before I undid Franklyn’s restraints I placed a hand on his shoulder, “I’m sorry, Franklyn.”

“For what?” his tears are flowing now with relief.

“For whatever happens next.”

I felt his arm jerk free of the tie and as he moved, free, I backed myself against the wall, “Go out with your hands up, “ I cautioned.

Franklyn ran up the stairs and I stayed where I was. I turned out all the lights in the basement, found a meat mallet to join my knife, and melted into the shadows.

When the basement door is kicked open I closed my eyes and willed my racing heart to slow down. I can hear the headless man laughing as the first light of their torches breaks apart the darkness. They move heavily, slowly. I move light and fast. They are wearing armour but that armour does nothing against the mallet that, with a swing of my arm, shatters one man’s jaw and scatters his teeth across my basement floor. He doesn’t even have time to make a shot as the next blow arcs into the back of his knee and he hits the ground hard. His partner fires his gun into the darkness, that darkness that is mine not his, and I swing the mallet into his brachial plex, where his arm meets his shoulder, and he drops his gun as I plunge the knife into this neck and drag it toward me with a spray of deep red blood.

With blood spilt I'm lost in the fever of it all and with a renewed hunger I spun and kicked the hobbled man behind me. He was trying to lift his gun with one arm. I lept on him and though there are few points on his body that are not covered in armour I plunge the blade into his armpit, twisting until the metal hits bone.

Straddling him I can barely see his face in the dark, dim dilated eyes stared up at me and with a welcoming hunger I used one hand at his jaw to throw his head backward and the other I wrenched his helmet off and twisted my fingers into his hair before sinking my teeth into the heated pulse of his neck. His body rose and bucked under me as I tore at the flooded flesh, gulping down great quantities of blood. I hear him moan and my eyes roll back in my head. More are coming. The air is thick with the smell of blood and gunpowder and then–

I'm lying on my back. Staring up at the stars. My ears still feel like they're ringing from the gunshots. All around me is silent.

I'm back in the field.

Unlike before there is no one here with me. I'm surrounded, like pillars, by tall grasses that whispered and swayed with a breeze that stirred the damp hair that had fallen across my brow. I inhaled deeply and again everything hurts. I'm shivering violently even as I imagine my skin is scorching the earth. Naked again and covered in blood.

Survival is the only thing guiding me as I stood, stumbling, legs weakened and numb, and wrapped my arms around my bare chest. For a moment, lost and confused and terrified, I let the cold night wind wash over my body and let the goosebumps rise over my skin. How did it get so late so soon? Looking up, Orion stretched out above me and the creak of his bow drawn taunt against the stars was aiming for the horizon and the inevitable morning. 've lost time again.

My car was nowhere in sight. I walked down the road, bare feet scraped bloody against the tarmac and then, there in the distance. I can see a house. Its lights are the only warmth I can see in the vastness of the dark rolling grasses. I'm drawn to it, knowing nothing else as I walk toward it in aching, frozen steps.

It's only as I get closer that I realise I recognize this road. This house. I should have known. Should have realised.

I made it to the front of the house, up the driveway, and stood, exhausted within the warm squares of light falling from the windows. I can't walk anymore. I fell to my knees. There is a high pitched sound, emanating from all around me and the light from the windows strengthened, blooming out and around the house, all around me. I have to shield my eyes against the blinding light as it eclipses the house, flaring into a thousand points. It washed over me, raising every hair over my body and when I looked down at my arms I could see they were covered in a glimmering layer of gold that penetrated my skin. Then the great hum that had started stopped sharply as at the centre of the light a figure started to take shape. Within the swirls of gold it strode forward, a luminous being of light that drew my eyes to pinpricks but I couldn't look away.

And in a flash the night collapsed back into itself as the explosion of light folded back into the creature of light and there, standing before me, features finally becoming clear with my blinking eyes, was Will. Standing on his porch. With the last of my strength I fall to the ground just as he is running down the steps.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! Hannibal made it to Will and next chapter we will see Will hopefully helping out a confused, bloody cannibal that showed up naked at his front door. And not that it may matter to the reader, but this image of Hannibal falling at the steps of this brillant creature of light htat is revealed to be Will was the first clear picture I had of this story. I don't think I could write just how beautiful and relieving it was in my head but there we are.

Also, apologies for any grammar stuff, my head has been a crinkled piece of paper lately, trying to stay ahead of mental wellness but losing the fight here and there. Let me know who is looking forward to some classic chicken soup Hannibal moments, poor chap needs some TLC! Thank you for reading, means the world!

**also, just wrote the ending and omg, it is too perfect, i thought of it in a moment, mid smoke, and nearly punched the sky, argh, love how that happens.

Light and Water

Chapter Notes

> Here we are again, less of a wait from last time; last we saw Hannibal he nom-nomed on some guy's throat and then appeared naked at Will's doorstep . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I dragged my fingers through viscous consciousness. Grasped desperately after the present like it was something I could hold. I needed to stay awake. Shimmering swaths of red and orange pulsed across my pupils and I couldn't see Will's face. Everything hurt. My feet felt torn to ribbons and each breath I took was broken by sharp, shooting pains in my chest, shattering my already broken heart. I'd broken a rib but I can't remember breaking it. I can't remember anything. Except that I'd fought and ran and ran and now, somehow, I felt I was home.

"Hannibal," I heard Will shout above me and he's on the ground next to me. I could smell his dogs surrounding us and then their noses and fur were brushing against me.

"Will," I moaned as his hands came to touch my burning skin.

Rapid, wordless breaths, then, "Come on," Will said and I felt him trying to lift my uncooperative body from the ground. "Come on," his voice was strained and I tried to help him, tried to unfold my legs but exhaustion weighed my limbs to the earth. "Up, come on up," and he somehow lifted me off the ground. Through half lidded eyelids I could see my bare feet, marred with blood and dirt barely making contact with the ground.

I know we've entered his house when I felt warmth spread over my naked body. There is the sound of the door shutting and the scampering of paws on wood. Then I'm set down on his bed and I fall limply backwards.

"Can you hear me?" Will is asking me and I felt his hand on my face.

My eyes opened. I could almost see his face. I felt sure if I did I would be pulled from this shapeless void, find a tether to the earth, away from the fear and confusion coiled around my throat.

"Hannibal," he said again and his hand moved up to my forehead, "What happened?"

"I don't remember," I said and the words were a barely audible rasp. I see the outline of his face, the shivering lines of his walls that seem to bend and stoop at odd angles. The light around us is infused with the same golden hue I'd seen before and from which Will had emerged, it laid over us both and coated the ends of my eyelashes.

“You came to my house. You’re covered in blood. What’s the last thing you remember?” Will’s hands left my face and I felt him lift my arms, fingertips passing over my shoulders, over my ribs, searching for injury.

I whimpered when his hand touched my side, “A light,” I heard myself say and I could still taste blood in my mouth. My eyes rolled shut again. I can’t fight it. Not anymore.

“Hannibal!” Will had to shake my shoulders to keep me alert.

“I have to get out of here,” is all I can say and I don’t know where I’ve been or how much time has passed or if I’ve been followed.

“You’re burning up,” Will said and I felt his weight shift on the bed away from me, “I’m calling an ambulance.”

“No!” I shouted and a sudden jolt of energy coursed through my body, allowing me to sit up, *run run run* , “No, no, please, please,” I tried to stand, run, but Will moved his body in front of me.

“Stop!” Will’s hands are on me, holding me down, “Stop, Hannibal stop!”

“Don’t. Call. Please. I have to leave.”

“Where do you have to go?”

“They’re coming for me.”

There is a pause and I can hear the thundering of Will’s heart. His hands tighten on my shoulders, “They don’t know you’re here,” his hands slide down my spine to hold me up and I’m not sure if I imagine him pushing my blood wet hair from my face, “Can we get you cleaned up? Then figure out what we are going to do?”

Will?

My eyes finally found his. He was panting in the warm light and his brow was furrowed with concern. And fear.

Is he real?

I reached out my trembling hand and it found the solid plane of his chest. His heart is beating there.

“What day is it?” I asked and he held my gaze. I started to tremble.

“Saturday. I spoke with you yesterday. Do you remember?”

I did. The details slowly came back to me as if they were emerging like shadows peeling from the plaster walls. I took a deep breath, “I can’t trust what I remember.”

Will nodded, “Okay,” I felt his hand cover mine on his chest then he asked, “Is this your blood?”

I shook my head.

“Are you hurt?”

I nodded.

“Where?”

My hand lowered to my ribs.

“Alright,” Will said and paused for a moment. One of his dogs pushed their nose under Will’s arm and whined. My hand remained on his heart. I’d found my tether. But I could hear the gears of his mind working and as always the continuous pull, the languid fingers of illusion were threatening to drag me away from him again.

Will breathed in, “Let’s get you cleaned up,” his hand dropped from mine. The unsaid words, the words that were heavy in the air between us and rose goosebumps over my fevered skin were *get rid of evidence.*

Will put his arm around me and lifted me off the bed. I was too exhausted to help but I followed his lead. It's only when the bathroom light flickered on and I saw our reflection in the glass that I felt the first vague impressions of reality. I was naked. Covered in blood and dirt. Will, by proximity, was streaked with shocking red. I barely recognized myself.

Will set me down on the toilet and I slumped forward as he turned on the shower. The warmth and humidity of the water hit me quickly. I was shivering now, almost too much to sit safely where I was. As the water warmed Will left the bathroom and returned shortly with towels. His dogs seemed to follow his every step and with a dim awareness I saw their head peeking into the bathroom but they didn’t cross the threshold.

Steam gathered and I closed my eyes before I heard something soft hitting the ground. Will was moving around in the small space. When I opened my eyes again Will was stripped to his underwear and he’d placed towels all over the bathroom floor. They were plush and soft under my feet as Will threw my arm over his shoulders again and lifted me up as he pulled back the shower curtain. With a few grunts of effort and a hand to my hip Will got us both in the shower. He set me against the wall, hands on my sides, keeping me standing.

“You okay?” he asked, “Can you stand okay?” but his hands didn’t leave me.

I shook my head as the water washed down my face and I sputtered out a ragged cough.

“Okay, okay,” Will pulled me toward him and turned me so my back was to the water, “Just warm up, it’s okay.”

Instant heat shocked my system and I could barely catch my breath, felt it rattle in my chest as my feet slipped on the floor of the shower. Will pulled me closer. Warm. Finally. I wrapped my arms around him limply at first and set my tired head on his shoulder. We stood there for

some time. Water washed away all the blood and mud. For precious moments that could have been years my body, both chilled to the bone and on fire, relaxed under the warm water, in Will's arms. All I could hear was the sound of the water hitting our skin and our breathing resonating off the tiled walls. It felt perfect. Secret. Small. Safe.

Then, manoeuvring my body as I imagined he would have one of his dogs, Will took a washcloth and began to run it over my body. I moved with him, guided by his patient hands, finally no longer trembling, melting into the methodical movements like someone would a piece of piano music. He angled my head up and the washcloth passed over my throat and around my neck, spreading across each collarbone and down the line of my chest, scrubbing at the matted hair. When he turned me around I put a hand to the tiled wall and let him wash my back. Then the sharp smell of cedar and moss as he gently massaged shampoo through my hair. Turned me around again and dipped my head under the spray. Through the suds I caught his face, framed with tendrils of wet hair that still had a curl to it, determined and measured in all his movements yet somehow still gently. Last he turned to put himself under the water, one hand still on my hip, holding me steady.

And then the water was off and we stood in the steam for a moment. He hadn't said a word, had just worked diligently and with focus. With the same precision he helped me out of the shower and wrapped a towel around me before letting me sit on the edge of the tub. I watched the water drip down my legs and shivered once before Will passed a dry towel over my hair and down my face. Will left the bathroom again, though he was dripping wet., moving quickly, the white cotton of his soaked underwear sticking to the curves that would have normally delighted me.

Renewed, somewhat, I tried to dry myself, arms moving slowly and clumsily then, modesty somehow returning, I dried my genitals and placed the towel over myself. I sat still and scrubbed clean in Will's bathroom, hugging the towel to myself, missing his hands already.

When he returned he was in dry clothes and was carrying some for me. I didn't ask him to but he helped me stand again and, with a few grunts of pain and with his support, I managed to get into the blue pair of underwear he'd brought. When I tried lifting my arms to put on the shirt a sharp stab of pain stopped me and I didn't want to make a sound, to ruin the perfect silence, but a pained moan escaped my lips, sudden and sharp to us both. Will seemed to wince himself, pained too in the way that only he could be, and helped me again so I could drag the cool fabric over my head. The clothes smelled like him. The whole process seemed to take forever but once dressed again I felt at least somewhat more like myself.

When we returned to the living room he set me down on the bed which now had a new blanket on it. He'd pulled back the covers and with a final assist he pulled them over me after I'd laid down. I closed my eyes, warm and clean. I lost track of him for a moment, wondering if I would ever find it again or if I would recognize it if I did, but smelled one of his dogs as it hopped up onto the bed and curled up next to me. I should stay awake. Should keep running. But instead, I fell deep into sleep.

****

It was morning.

Opened my eyes and Will was sitting next to me.

“You and Winston got attached in my absence, I see,” he said and I looked to the side to see the dog still lying where he had been last night.

“Yes,” I agreed and reached my hand to pet the soft fur, “We did have at least one thing in common.”

“A fondness for chew toys?”

Missing you , I thought, blinking at the sun pouring through the windows, “I spoiled him. And the others. They associate me with good food.”

Will humphed in agreement and his chair creaked as he leaned closer to me, elbows resting on his knees,“You seem clearer.”

“I am,” I agreed.

“Clear enough for an explanation?”

“You didn’t call an ambulance.”

“No,” he shifted in his chair again, “I didn’t. Didn’t get any sleep either,” he scrubbed a hand across his face, “And you’ll notice no one came looking for you,” he swallowed and met my eyes, and though there wasn’t a sliver of mockery in his words I couldn’t believe them, “You’re safe.”

I tried sitting up, looking around the room that felt so much different than it had last night. I inhaled and smelled the faint smell of smoke on Will’s hair. He’d been burning something.

Settled somewhat higher on the pillows I placed a hand over my ribs and looked away from him, “I still don’t remember how I got here,” how do I explain to him, how do I know what is true and what isn’t, “Much of what I’ve been experiencing is difficult to explain.”

“Try.”

“I barely made it out of my house. That’s the last I remember. Armed men came and were trying to kill me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” I breathed, “Something maybe to do with one of my patients. I’ve been,” I frowned, “I’ve been ill, feverish.”

“You don’t think that has something to do with it?”

“What if it does?”

“Afraid of looking crazy?”

So Will already believed I was crazy, he just wasn't saying it. His tired yet concerned eyes didn't leave me, the knot in his brow shadowed his face and I felt disarmed, "I don't want to be seen differently."

"You think I would judge you for being sick?"

"You may judge me for my choices."

"I find it hard to imagine what choices led to you naked and covered in blood on my front lawn."

I looked away and my hand returned to my ribs, "Let it be a dream then," so many things were only dreams to me lately, "Let it wash down the drain with the blood."

"Hannibal," Will said, drawing my focus, "I don't think anyone is chasing after you," he paused until I met his gaze, "You're a doctor, what would you do if this were me?" when I said nothing he sat back and took a breath, "If I go to your house, check in on what's happened, will you go to the doctors?"

For a moment I considered this, the morning sun warm on my face, the dog breathing slowly in and out next to me. I felt as if this were all on the verge of shattering, like a gathering weight over thin glass covered in a spiderweb of cracks, "And if you see something you don't want to see?"

"Knowing is better than not knowing," Will said simply and with certainty and stood up. He walked away and came back shortly with a glass of water and some toast with peanut butter.

"Give me a few hours," Will told me as he set down the food and water, "You could try and run, I won't be here to stop you but if you're here when I get back, armoured men or not, I'm taking you to hospital."

"Are you so sure?" I asked him, "Someone's blood was on both of us last night."

"The world's a bloody place, Hannibal," he said and turned to put on his jacket. Several of his dogs waited expectantly by the door, "I figure I'm dirtier than most."

"Will," I said from his bed and he stopped. Just one more moment, I begged, one more moment of sunshine through windows and the smell of peanut butter and when he knew me as I was now. I wanted to say so much more but just said, "Thank you,"

Will almost smiled and yet it was all I would ever need, "You would have done the same for me," he said easily.

Will left and I stood on the edge of choice, whether to run or remain, whatever the consequences. I wasn't even sure I could stand. WIthout disturning the dog I pulled the covers off my legs and tried, gritting my teeth through the pain in my ribs, to swing my legs over the side of the bed. Carefully my feet were set on the cool floor. They were wrapped in bandages.

Chapter End Notes

This was a diffiult converstation to write. Will is in more of a positon of power in this chapter, obviously, and I'm pretty sure he knows that whatever is wrong with Hannibal supersedes whatever Hannibal is reporting but Will can be . . . gentler about it, strike more of a deal, sort of? He wants Hannibal to stay where he is and he wants to know the truth. I think Will handled it well. And as much as Will is struck by a sudden naked, very sick Hannibal at the door, Hannibal both wants to stay and go. Complicated, sigh.

Anyhow, as always thanks for reading, really, I adore everyone that's followed along, I hope I've been able to surprise you a bit and I hope, somewhat, that the characters are acting at least a little bit in character. Prob only a few more chapters left, dear readers. Leave a comment or a kudos, and as always take care of yourselves, who else will, eh?

Sweet and Wanting

Chapter Notes

> Last we saw Hanni he was tucked in nicely at Will's. Will was off to see what he could see back at Hannibal's house . . .

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will fed his dogs peanut butter. As I slowly ate the peanut butter toast he'd made, propped up on pillows in the sunny warmth of Will's house, the dogs sat in a row staring unblinking at each bite that passed my lips. One let a drop of drool slide from his mouth to the floor, eyes wide and hopeful. It was so quiet. There were no voices but my mind felt tender and raw like a burn and my memories, distant and lilting, blew through the scorched landscape like ash.

I rolled the sweet sticky taste around my tongue and couldn't remember the last time I'd had peanut butter. Did Will have it often? Standing over the sink after a long day, too tired to make anything else. Did it remind him of childhood just as much as it reminded him of his solitude? The last bite in my mouth, I ran my palm across my lips and licked at some remnants of the sweetness on my fingertips. The dogs, more than a little disappointed, dispersed with a few low growls and went to their beds.

Run if you want to , Will had said, *I won't be here to stop you* .

I laid my head back on the pillow, looking at a few wisps of cobwebs clinging to his ceiling. I'd run before. Though at the time, filled with heady vigour of youth, I wouldn't have characterised it as such. But this time, it would be running. This time I wouldn't get far. There would be no reinvention of myself. Will and what he meant and what he could be, somehow, surprisingly and in every way unexpectedly for someone like me, had gathered weight like the core of a dying star within me. Compacting in a great, heated centre that begged me to remain, stay, no going back to the way things were, not now, not ever again. It had felt gradual maybe, subtle and secret, but then looking back, every moment, from when I'd first met him till now felt as thinly separated in time as if with rice paper. I hadn't had a moment to wonder if my heart was capable of it or wanted it and then suddenly, with no more excuses or blood to drown it with, I was left to admit the truth. The truth I'd seen while being consumed in the great maw of the earth.

I let myself imagine, with a heavy heart, leaving this place, leaving it all behind, I imagined myself somewhere I'd never been, somewhere with vivid shades of green I'd never seen, sand beneath my toes and vast empty rooms where my lone footsteps echoed.

What if Will ran with me? Would he, if he knew what I was? I imagined Will at the bow of a ship, his skin tanned and gleaming in the sun, I imagined my hand reaching for his as our feet met the shore and we lingered with the sun as it set.

But it's a fantasy. Isn't it? Not real.

Run , he'd said.

And maybe he was right.

I sat up, scanning the small house, wondering if just Will and Jack would return or if it would be a whole team of the same armoured men. Unsteady on my feet, holding my side and my broken rib, I moved through Will's house. He had a rifle. I don't use guns. In the kitchen I found one very dull knife and one very sharp knife. There were three forks and two spoons in his drawer, all from a different set.

Run .

The voice again. I almost lost my footing, groaning as I caught myself on Will's kitchen counter. No, I silently begged, stop.

They are on their way.

The voice seemed to be coming from a distance and I closed my eyes as it echoed with the word *run, run, run, run* .

"I can barely stand," I said aloud through my tight throat, "I won't get far."

They know.

"I know!" anger rose in me, anger and despair.

Run before they capture you. Run before they pull out all your teeth and bury you deep underground.

I signed heavily, unable to catch my breath, suddenly shaking again. I can't be caught. I won't be caught. I knew what that future looked like, down a damp, twisting set of stairs, left to rot, my hand cupping the wound and picking it open to feel the warmth of it bleed when the years turned grey and endless.

Self preservation dictated that I run. Even it meant ripping a part of myself dripping to the floor and leaving it here. He can keep it. I'll have no use for it.

With something bordering on resolve I found a rucksack and began gathering what supplies I could, clothes that didn't fit me and what little food he had and water. I shouldered on one of his jackets, wrapping Will's smell around me with gritted teeth against the tears.

As I bent down to put my foot into one of Will's boots a shimmering pool of light spilled around me and for a moment I thought it was only the sun breaking away from a cloud but it rose steadily to a blinding point. I shielded my eyes but as soon as it had come it dimmed again into a warm golden hue surrounding me. The details of Will's house, his dogs in their beds, were barely visible, trapped behind the haze like a curtain.

"What are you doing?"

The voice came from beside me. It had form and shape. I looked up and saw Will, or what was the approximation of Will that I had glimpsed before, his body filled impossibly with an unearthly light. His eyes burned white hot and his veins, visible purple threads under the heated brilliance of his skin, traced beautiful patterns across his face. His hair seemed almost bleached white and beams of light shot from the ends of his curls.

Yet somehow it still felt like Will. Or Will as I saw him. He blinked and moved as the sun did, flickering forward, “Hannibal,” his voice echoed through my heart.

I shook my head and closed my eyes, wanting to disperse the hallucination, no matter how beautiful, but it pierced through my eyelids, “No,” I begged him, “You’re not real.”

“Your feet are already bloody from running” his words lilted around me like musical notes, “Stay,” he said and I clamped my hands over my ears, “Stay with me.”

“You’re not real,” I said again and opened my eyes, willing him to be gone, tears flowing down my cheeks. Through the bare skin of his chest I could see his heart beating through the translucent skin, a deep splash of red beneath his ribs. I heard it beating past the thundering of my own racing heart.

“You can’t run anymore, Hannibal.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?!” I demanded, throwing the shoe to the ground.

“Stay,” he repeated.

“I can’t,” I moaned, covering my eyes with my hands, not wanting to hear his words,, “And you’re not Will.”

“Regret is the last breath of a dying life.”

“If I stay they will kill me,” I gasped and looked up into his face, tears wet on my face.

“No,” Will said and I felt his luminous hand touch my face. I wanted to jerk away from the heat of it, afraid I would be burnt but then, blinking as my pupils shrunk to tiny dots the warmth of his touch crashed in agonising brilliance through my entire body. Frozen, the being of light knelt in front of me. My breath caught in my throat. It felt as if I was breathing in the heat of the sun. Will leaned forward and I could barely see. A smile spread across his face, “No, Hannibal. I’m the one that kills you,” he said, closing the distance between us and slowly, with a swell of radiant energy, he pressed his lips to mine. His hand tipped my chin higher and I fell into the light, endlessly falling into the kiss.

With a sickening jolt I’m shocked away from Will’s embrace and in a sinking flash of white light, I’m suddenly standing outside of Wil’s home. I rocked back on my heels, almost losing my footing, not able to see. A cold wind ripped through my clothes, over my heated skin, and the sound of Will’s dogs running through the yard surrounded me. My eyes finally focused into the distance and I can see what looks like ten black cars barreling down the road. Fear strangled me, I’m too weak, not ready, I have no weapons in my hands. Then, with several

shuddering breaths of cold air, the images of the cars flickered out of my field of vision and were gone. All that were left were two cars pulling into his driveway.

Something gives way and I fall to my knees, barely catching myself on my palms. I want my brain to catch up, to tell me what this all means but nothing is clear, nothing makes sense. Car doors slammed shut and footsteps came to greet me.

“Hannibal!” I heard and I looked up to see Will leaping up the steps. He put a hand on my shoulder and I can hear another person walking slowly toward us. It’s Jack.

“Doctor,” Jack said from the bottom of the stairs, “You’re a hard man to find.”

Will lifted me to standing and his hands were cool on my skin, “He needs medical attention, Jack,” he shouted impatiently.

“I can see that,” Jack seemed unphased by this. Through the sweaty curtain of my hair I was able to get a look at him, hands in his pockets, hat tipped over his eyes. Would he bring me in himself? Had he seen the bloody mess I’d left of his men?

“What’s happened?” I asked. If Jack was going to pull his gun he would have already. He knew I wouldn’t be able to stop him.

“One of your patients is dead,” Jack said.

“What?” I asked with shock. Jack wasn’t here to arrest me. And as my brain limped forward in creaking, uneven steps I could still taste the gush of blood in my mouth. Could still hear his body hitting the ground. The smell of gunpowder. A startled sound left my lips as a shiver ran up my spine, “I don’t understand.”

“Your house was empty,” Will told me, “The backdoor was wide open.”

“We feared you were abducted, Doctor. Lucky Will knew where you were.”

I shook my head, “One of my patients?” I swallowed thickly, trying to focus, “Who?”

“Franklyn Froideveaux.”

“How?” I asked, voice shaking. I’d let him go.

“We don’t know all the details yet, but an associate of his is our prime suspect. And he’s missing.”

“Tobias,” I said and this piqued Jack’s interest.

“You know him.”

“I know of him. Franklyn talked about him.”

“In what way?”

“Jack,” Will said sternly as a warning, “This can wait.”

Of course Jack continued, “When was the last time you saw Franklyn Froideveaux alive?”

Franklyn’s last breath was expelled somewhere within my missing time. He must have known I would kill him. But I don’t remember doing it. Hours had been lost before I’d found myself here, with Will, “I don’t remember,” I told Jack, thinking of the blood that had washed down Will’s drain, of the blankets that Will had burned in the yard, there was nothing left.

Jack let us go and, according to our agreement, I followed Will to his car. He helped me into the passenger seat and Jack stood by the door. Safely in my seat, Will shut the door and I watched them talking through the window.

As my eyelids grew heavy I watched the cold rain that had started dripping down the window. I let myself go back to a warm safe place, to my head resting on Will’s wet shoulder, water rushing over us, one hand pressed into my lower back, the other on the back of my back, cradling my head to him. I could hear the soothing hum of his breath echoing around us and it was like we were standing in a cathedral. I closed my eyes and let Will’s hands slide over my body as the blood washed away.

I hadn’t run. I was alive. Again.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy. I really really hope I didn't lose anyone here. This was a difficult chapter to write. I know what I'm trying to say, what I've been trying to say, and I'm not sure I made it across. Please, let me know what you think. I think next chapter everyone will get a good exposition dose, you know, when Hannibal is capable of processing, so things will be clear that are not here.

But what it came down to was that fear and truth and longing that Hannibal has. The finality of love. Love he didn't think he could feel. Love he'd rather not feel. It's shifted everything inside of him. I feel like even without the illness, in the show, he knew what Will was and knew how it would end but did it anyway. Will is beautiful. But he is also deadly. Which Hanni loves, lol. I dunno, if there are ways you think about this let me know and there is more to come, this isn't the end, but for now, I'm just going to drop it here, get over my self doubt and that's that.

Happy note, I saw The Secret of Grindelwald. Mads was stunning. The movie was shit. But as I saw someone post, it was a near audible moan everytime he came on screen. So beautiful. And gay. Like really. I need to talk to someone about it. I don't know what happened. Sigh.

Thank you for reading. Next time? Hannibal in hospital. Finally!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sharp, stinging bleach and the musty smell of linoleum. I'm pulled from unconsciousness in swimming, languid motions, rising to the surface with a startled gasp. A random firing of nerves sent hapless signals to my feet that jerked clumsily under tucked sheets. My eyes opened slowly, carefully. I'm lying in a hospital bed. There are no lights, only the light from under the door and what dim light is coming through the double paned window. It's quiet and the air is stale. My arms are heavy at my sides and when I tried to move them I felt the tug of needles in my arms.

I looked down at myself. My chest is rising softly under the itchy blanket. They must have given me pain killers because my ribs didn't hurt anymore. I shifted my eyes up to the machines and saw my heart rate and blood pressure through squinted eyes. Normal. Followed the IV lines up to the bags hanging above me. Fluids. Antivirals. On the wall across from my bed was a white board with large letters spelling out "Your name is Hannibal. You are in hospital and being treated for a serious illness. It is November 13,th 2013".

I turned my head to the side and saw Will sitting in a chair next to my bed. From the sound and rhythm of his breathing I can tell he's sleeping, leaning back, arms crossed over his chest. I remember a vague blur of the drive to hospital, then the feeling of sinking again, and Will's face through a plane of glass and the clatter of wheels on the floor. I can't tell what time of day or night it is. By the sounds outside of my room it could be very late or very early.

I laid my head back on the pillow, steadily breathing in and out. For the first time in weeks my body felt like my own, warm and comfortable under the blankets tucked so tight it was like swaddling. I could smell I hadn't showered since that night at Wills but it was hard to say how long ago that was.

I shifted my eyes to look at Will again. For one perfect moment it felt like time had no where to go. It had no desire to move forward or backward and at least, for now, neither did I. Because I knew when it did move forward again, inevitably, things would be different. I would be different. I was capable of finding beauty in the worst and the darkest parts of humanity, in my own mind and desires most of all, but I knew now, with hot tears in my eyes, that there was no beauty in madness. No appreciation for the thin and precarious threads on which the most fragile aspect is tethered. The self is not a solid, weighted thing, it is far from the impenetrable fortress which I'd prided myself on. It had slipped away from me like it was made of feathers.

With a groan at the heavy feeling in my limbs I reached up to pull the cannula out of my nose.

"Better put it back."

Will was awake, arms still crossed over his chest, head leaned back, eyes open, “They’ll strap you down again.”

I pushed at the tubes around my jaw, hands stiff and restrained by the IV lines, “How long?” my voice was hoarse from disuse.

Will glanced at his watch, ”Two days,” he answered and scrubbed sleep from his eyes before sitting forward, “How are you feeling?”

Though I was still tired I felt a distinct lack of tension, like something had moulded me smooth. “Better. I think.”

He nodded, relief apparent on his face, then paused before saying, “It’s encephalitis.”

I blinked, realisation draggin slowly behind the word, “Encephalitis,” I repeated and felt the finality and understanding drip over me. It was rare enough that few doctors, especially emergency doctors wouldn’t think of it. I hadn’t. Remarkable that someone had, “Did they do imaging?”

“Yeh,” he nodded, “After I told them what I saw.”

Of course. He’d been there with the doctors to act as the sole voice of reason, an orator of what I’d said and done, or at least as much as he saw. Which is why I’m here, in this room, not upstairs sedate and spiralling further into madness.

“I’m sorry, Will,” I said.

He shrugged and took a deep breath, eyes shifting away from me. He was still for a moment before saying, “You really scared me,” I dropped my eyes from him, pained at the thought, “They said that you could have lost time, seen things that weren’t there; is that what had happened, when you showed up at my door?”
“I’m still not sure what happened. What was real,” I replied, “I only remember feeling afraid,” I felt a shiver run across my shoulders and raise the hairs on my arms, “I went where I knew I’d be safe.”

Will’s brow furrowed, “You knew I’d take care of you?”

He wouldn’t mention the blood and how he’d gotten rid of it and any evidence of it. He had already built his fort around it. Another between us.

“Like one of your strays,” I offered.

Will gave a short laugh, “Messiest one so far.”

Despite his joking tone, and because my head was more clear, I wanted him to know I was grateful, “You could have just called the police.”

“No I couldn’t,” he said softly, looking down at this hands for a moment, “You needed help,” he looked up, “Of course, if I’d really believed you that there was a SWAT team right behind

you I wouldn't have gotten naked," it was a feeble joke but his smile, no matter how small, eased my discomfort, "Good thing you were crazy."

I returned the smile and glanced toward the door, "Not even a guard outside?"

"They figured I could take you."

I pushed the cannula back into my nose. My hands, imaginary asalants or not, were covered in small cuts and scrapes and several knuckles were torn bare, "What happened to Franklyn?"

"He had bad taste in friends," Will answered, then leaned back in his chair, "We found his body at his friend's, mutilated like the musician was. Beverly found your number was the last person he'd called and when Jack couldn't find you he reached out to me. He found me at your house."

Franklyn had left my house alive. During my lost time I must have unknowingly found him again. Cleaned up my mess. He was a loose thread that had been cut. I hoped for a moment that felt raw and tender like the knuckles on my hands that Franklyn hadn't suffered. And not that Tobias deserved homage, at least it appeared to Jack and the others that he was the wayward murderer. I was far from a reliable narrator and regardless of all the blood I'd shed, real or imaginary, my illness was the perfect alibi. And even when I'd lost my sense of self, unknowingly there was still the darkness there, protecting me, protecting our secret.

I cleared my throat, realising how dry my mouth was, "It seems too much to grieve right now," I said, "I regret I wasn't able to help him more."

"Jack's just kicking himself because he'd already interviewed Tobias," Will had gotten up and poured a glass of water for me, which he handed to me. In the light from over my bed I could see dark circles under his eyes and for a moment I remembered them inches from mine, lashes wet with water from the shower. He shifted to put his hands in his pockets and stepped back, "I can let you rest. Should probably call the doctor anyhow."

"Will," I said, not wanting him to leave, "I feel like I should apologise for my actions. While I was sick. Even, and especially the ones I can't remember."

"Truth is you seemed like yourself, right until you didn't. Not sure anyone else would have noticed," he met my eyes, "But you felt different. To me. You felt deeper, like there was something opening up under you. It was like I could hear the echo," he paused, "And I'd never felt you like that."

It was beyond me to imagine what he'd felt. There were several things I was sure I'd not been able to keep hidden, things that would have bled a deep red. Whether it was obligation or curiosity or insecurity I told him, "I lost time when you came over with wine."

His eyes fluttered, brow furrowed, "You don't remember?"

Why did his words sound so vulnerable, clinging tightly to the small pool of light both of us were in. The phantom feeling of his lips on mine made my voice shake, "I remember something very different."

Will considered this and his eyes left mine, shifting to the shadows, “You weren’t yourself,” he looked back to me, “But you have nothing to apologise for,” then with slow movements he reached out his hand and carefully took mine in his, holding it for a moment before saying, “Rest. I’ll tell Jack to at least wait till morning before he comes and gets a statement from you.”

I tightened my hand around his and with a final glance he left, shifting into shadow and out the door. Alone again I pulled my hands up to my chest and closed my eyes. The future had been set in motion.

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“Thank you for meeting with me, Doctor,” Jack said from his position at the end of my bed as if I’d had a choice. The doctors had been to see me several times, satisfied with my progress, and I hadn’t heard any more voices or seen anything that wasn’t there since I’d arrived. They assured me that it could take months to feel back to normal, regardless of my improvement right now.

“Of course, Jack,” I said to him, sitting up in my bed. At least I’d been able to run a comb through my hair.

“This is just a followup regarding the death of your patient Franklyn Froideveaux. His last phone call was to you; what did he call you about?”

“He was rescheduling an appointment.”

“During the phone call did he mention anything about Tobias Budge?”

“No,” I took a drink of water, “Though he’d told me about him before. He’d expressed concerns about their relationship.”

“Was it romantic?”

“No.”

“Can you think of a reason why someone would want to kill Mr. Froideveaux?”

“He was uncommonly giving and often to a fault, compassionate. Willing to do anything for someone he considered a friend,” I paused, “Though his longing for connection has, had, put him at risk of being taken advantage of by those he thought he could trust.”

“And you never went to his home, or the home of Tobias Budge?”

“Our relationship was professional.”

“Alright,” he said with a huff of completion, offering me what I’m sure he thought was charity, “If anything comes up I’ll know where to find you.”

“Anything I can do to help.”

“I was sorry to hear you were unwell, Doctor.”

“Thank you, Jack,” I said, “I’m happy to be on the mend.”

“With the help from a friend.”

“Yes,” I nodded in agreement.

“You should know, Will is back on the job full time.”

“Even after what occurred in West Virginia?”

Jack took a breath, “I’ve reevaluated my strategy with him. I think it will help. And I’m hoping I can rely on you again.”

I frowned, “Will he be chasing after Mr. Budge?”

“I’ve alerted neighbouring field offices; if they hear anything they will let me know.”

“Allowing your full attention to be elsewhere.”

“Speaking of,” Jack cleared his throat, “We received a very bizarre package in the mail the other day. There wasn't any return postage but it was clear who it was from.”

“What was it?”

“A severed head,” Jack said flatly, “From the Ripper,” Jack’s chest swelled, “With a note that apologised for his absence, promising that he was alive and well. He even apologised for the *uninspired piece of abstract art* and claimed he would be progressing to his Baroque era.”

“The Baroque period preceded the Renaissance, which was marked by the search for individual meaning and realism. Baroque is all about passion and emotion,” I smiled to myself. Even in a blackout I was prognosticating my path, “You have a good team, Jack,” I said reassuringly, “If anyone can catch him, it’s them.”

“We will,” Jack said with a surridy I couldn’t judge him for. He did indeed have a good team. And the head, gone missing all this time, was a mess I’d passed tauntingly along to him. He put his hat back on again and moved toward the door, “Get well, Doctor.”

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I started to go back to the office a week after I got out of the hospital. I did not schedule any appointments but had become listless enough at home that I needed a change of scenery. The first few days were spent restlessly staring at the shadows, expecting them to shiver and take form, afraid to speak and hear the echoes of my own voice. I took showers often. I still felt the chill deep in my bones and the warmth and white noise filled the silence. Dressing again

in one of my suits felt strange so I just put on a jumper. Underneath I wore the shirt that Will had given me that night. I hadn't given it back and didn't intend to.

In my office I organised my files and dusted my shelves, whether they needed them or not and thought about how long I would keep Franklyn's file or if Jack would want them. I'd spent a considerable amount of time attempting to unearth any memories of that night; killing Franklyn, framing the misfortuned Mr. Budge for the murder by bring the body to his home, and then, somehow making my way to Will's. All I remember was the terror of my delusions and running. And when I had returned home from the hospital my car had not been moved from the last time I'd used it and there was no blood of need for clean up. Though I suppose I could have done that too during my missing time. Faced with these incongruities I had to admit none of it made any sense.

Mid-afternoon, when I was considering going back home, tired again and needing to take my medication, there was a knock on my door. With a frown I approached the door, wiping my hands on my trousers and setting down a dust rag I'd been using.

Will was standing in my waiting room. He turned when the door opened.

"Will," I said and a smile came unbidden to my face as he took a few steps forward and held out his hand. Reaching out my hand to his he placed something smooth and cold in my palm.

"I'd like to resume my therapy, Doctor," Will said.

He walked past me, the request catching me off guard. For the first time I was unsure of the colour and taste and texture of this future, it felt wide and uncertain.

Opening my hand, it held the knife I'd given to Franklyn.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end for now, dear readers. I could agonize about this ending for ages but I decided just to put it out there. This story really got to me, it did not evolve like I was sure it would and sitting in Hannibal's madness was difficult. I am happy with the ending and would be curious what you thought. In the end, how does one recover from something like this? Slowly. So much, a lot, of what he thought he was experiencing was not real. The only thing, oddly, that was real, was Franklyn. And I knew long before I wrote it that the blacked out Hanni would be doing his thing, setting up bodies and covering his tracks, somehow, as he alluded to, there must be a part of himself that is impervious to madness.

What do you think the ending meant? Will found the knife in evidence? On Franklyn? Starting therapy again because Jack wants him to/to catch the Ripper?

Anyway, I'm ending it here for now, if anything changes you may see more but it was a wild ride! Thank you all who supported me in this and I really don't have plans for my

next fic . . . apart from Water Nymph Will lol. Either way, no madness for me for awhile.

End Notes

I'm posting this short beginning to urge me to work through some writer's block/loss of confidence. It is short, I know, but my lovely readers are a tremendous boon in that department, comments or no comments.

Some details about how this will go . . . Abigail isn't in this story, I've written plenty with her and she just doesn't fit in this piece. Franklyn will be in it, because as I've established, I love him and can't wait to see them together in Fantastic Beasts, controversy or no controversy. As we move forward I want everyone to be curious about what it means for someone like Hannibal to be sick, really sick, and what his relationship with madness is, both as a murderer and as a psychiatrist. Also think about how Will's journey would have been different if he hadn't gotten sick in the first year . . .

That's all really for now, comments are of course welcome, or a sharp lash across my back with a cheeky salacious "heave ho" if you'd like; I really would take anything. Hope everyone is doing well, if you are in the northern parts of the planet never fear, spring will come, it always does.

*The title is supposed to be French for Brain on Fire, if any French speakers know something different give us a shout, eh?

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